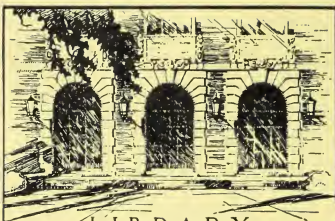




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AUDREY.

A Novel

BY MISS LAURA JEWRY,

AUTHOR OF

“THE TIDE OF LIFE,” “THE CUP AND THE LIP,” “THE
FOREST AND THE FORTRESS,” ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.


VOL. II.

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A U D R E Y.

CHAPTER I.

It was long past midnight ere the sexton and his unfortunate guests reached the Dabneys' cottage, and Audrey, in no slight dread of her aunt's displeasure, ran forward to announce their coming, and, if possible, smooth the way for their reception. Breathlessly, her heart beating with agitation and excitement, and her soft eyes dimmed with tears of pity, she communicated her news ; " they were all coming, Dame Page, Johnnie and her uncle,"

and then forestalling the tart and angry exclamation that hovered on the reluctant hostess' thin lips, she went on hurriedly—relating how her uncle and herself, on reaching the fire, had found Herr Findelkind there ; how the Tryolese had saved Dame Page and John, at his own great peril ; and how he was hurt, and had been taken to the Crown by the landlord at Mr. Alton. It would be difficult to say why the girl thought Basil's name likely to win her aunt to kindness ; but the instinct which suggested its mention did not deceive her ; Mrs. Dabney smoothed her ruffled brow, muttered a reluctant welcome to the poor Pages when they entered, and only relieved her mind by turning to Jonathan, and giving him a severe rating for not having had the humanity to bring poor dear Herr Findelkind to their house as well, instead of leaving him to the mercy of strangers.

“ But,” she added, “ she saw how it was, it

was his unjust jealousy. This was what she had to suffer for marrying an old man."

The sexton stared at her for a moment, in solemn silence; but, as he frequently found her anger unintelligible, he contented himself with thinking she had a kind motive for being cross *now*, and that he had nothing to fear on the score of his thoughtless hospitality to the Pages; he therefore took it in good part, and promised to "see that Herr Fiddleskin was taken care of before he slept."

Meantime, Audrey was busy in preparing John's sofa-bed, which was in a few minutes ready for his reception, and in persuading Dame Page to retire to her room. The cripple had received no injury from the fire, save the loss of a few of his brown curls; but he had been greatly alarmed, and not a little hurt by his ejection from the window, and his grandmother was unwilling to leave him directly; so, whilst Jonathan and his wife (for Mrs. Dabney insisted on accompanying him) returned, with

the villagers, to enquire after Basil, she and Audrey seated themselves beside the poor lad's couch ; the dame being enveloped in a large cloak and shawl, for roused from slumber by the fire, she had no time to dress herself. Few words were spoken by the trio, for John was exhausted and in pain, and the old woman quite stupified and overpowered by the sadness of the terrible calamity which had fallen on her. Never had time appeared so long to our heroine as that hour's watch. She thought her uncle and aunt never would return ; but they came at last, and brought favourable accounts of Basil. He was much hurt, but in no absolute danger, and Doctor Penrose was in attendance, and Mr. Melton had come down to the inn to see him.

“ And I'm glad *I* went,” said Mrs. Dabney, laughing, “ he quite brightened up when he saw me, and seemed so grateful.”

She was not deceived in thinking thus, for Basil had for a moment entertained the hope

that Audrey might be with her, and for her sake even Mrs. Dabney was a welcome guest.

Very sad effects followed this conflagration. Poor Dame Page could not recover from the shock of such terror, and the anguish of such grief. The aged woman's mind sank beneath it. She had seen her old home, endeared by many associations, destroyed before her eyes; in those terrible devouring flames had perished the treasured relics of her life—memorials of her dead husband, of her children—the few hardly earned comforts and little savings of her widowhood. True, the lovely cottage and its humble furniture would have been scarcely worth the notice of an insurance office; but the aged woman had lost more than a rich man *could* lose; and with her means of living, her spirits sank, and her intellect faded. We say faded, for it sank gradually. It was not till more than a week had passed, and the squire and the clergyman were interesting themselves in restoring the village school, that they per-

ceived the state of imbecility into which the dame had sunk. She could no longer work in her calling; the childishness of extreme old age had fallen on her.

The agony of her helpless grandson, when at length reluctantly compelled to own the fact, was terrible. It was now that he felt, in its utmost misery the physical affliction which deprived him of the power of supporting her destitute age—now that she also was helpless and afflicted. With bitter tears he lamented his fate to Audrey, on whom the blow fell almost as heavily as on himself, and she, in her turn, deplored that their good pastor was gone, and that they could not apply for advice and comfort to him who had been such a universal consoler, guide, and friend. Fast was the small cloud spreading over the horizon of our friends at Charliewood. The worthy Mr. Melton, and Mr. Benbow, were puzzled as to what they should do, for these helpless ones; a subscription was made for the dame, to which

both gentlemen contributed largely, but they alone had the means of giving, in that poor place, and the sum collected though sufficient to hire and furnish a house was altogether insufficient to provide for the future maintenance of two people, for though John could help teach, and had been wont to do so under his grandmother's eye, his bad health and incapacity of moving without assistance, rendered him unfit to manage the unruly boys of a village, even if there had not been already a schoolmaster.

Audrey, however, came forward to disentangle this web of difficulty. She besought Jonathan to let *her* try and take the dame's place; she would not leave *him*; she would but be absent for a few hours daily; and she would promise to hire out of the proceeds of the school a girl to help her aunt in her household duties, during her absence. She felt certain that she should succeed and be able to support her old instructress, and earliest friend

At first, the sexton listened very unwillingly to this proposal, he would rather have had Audrey married to the chemist; it was a "genteel match," in his opinion, and would have added to the family respectability. But when she positively declared her resolution never to become Mrs. Alton, and Mrs. Dabney, tempted by the idea of keeping a servant, observed that it could do no harm to let Audrey try it for a time, and that if once established, it might be a provision for her bye and by, Jonathan yielded, and was consoled by the admiration and praise his good nature and generosity to the poor Pages obtained for him.

Mr. Melton and the clergyman bestowed the most unqualified approbation on Audrey's scheme; and promised not only to support her by their patronage and recommendation (of great weight among the rustics!) but to allow a small sum weekly to dame Page, till her young successor could completely support her.

The Squire permitted her to inhabit rent-free the lodge which had once been the home of her parents, and her own birth-place, and thither, after Audrey had made every possible arrangement for their comfort, the old dame and John Page were removed.

Autumn was now drawing to its close, but a rich golden sunset lighted up the small sparkling panes of the lattice window, and glittered on the rustling ivy leaves of the lodge, when the little party from Jonathan's cottage paused upon the threshold, for Audrey to unfasten the door. The sexton himself, stimulated to fresh deeds of kindness by the applause bestowed upon his recent doings, drew Johnnie's garden-chair, and blithe Mistress Ford lent her arm to the poor dame, who looked with a pleased though vacant smile at her new home. Audrey, her cheeks glowing with honest pleasure, tripped on before, and now, with a glad smile, played portress, and throwing back the door, displayed to their surprised gaze, a very

fac-simile of the school-house of former days. There were the same pictures on the wall, the same golden bird (in appearance) in its cage—the young girl's copy of the once admired sampler decorated the same spot over the chimney-piece that the dame's had one adorned—and the forms, and the table, and Johnnie's sofa, looked as if they had risen from their fiery grave to attend again on their poor mistress. Mistress Ford uttered a "Well a day!" of surprise and admiration; Jonathan muttered that it was "wonderful like;" and Audrey was rewarded for this ingenious device with which she had hoped to reconcile the dame to her new dwelling, by the old woman's childish delight at finding herself, as she believed, at home again, and the happy smile and tearful eyes of her play-fellow Johnnie.

"Audrey," he said, when he was installed on his new couch, "you are certainly a good fairy as well as Prince Findelkind. One appears miraculously, as it were, and saves us from the flames of our old home, and the

other restores us to one, which seems to have been conjured out of the ashes of the last—I can scarcely believe that this is not the identical room in which I first taught you your lessons. My poor old mother! how happy you have made her once more.”

“I am so glad! I thought if she had quite familiar objects always round her that her mind might in time be restored; and when I proposed trying to make this room look as much like her own as I could, Mr. Melton agreed that it should be so, and gave me leave to buy what furniture I liked. But,” she added, with a slight blush, “you are *really* more indebted to Prince Findelkind, as you call him, than to me, for your present comforts, since he very largely contributed to the subscription for repairing your grandmother’s loss.”

“Did he?” said John, and an expression of pain flitted over his face. “Well, he is a brave, generous fellow; and I only wish he were well enough to come and receive my

thanks ! He has suffered a good deal, and a long while, from his exertions in our behalf."

"A whole month," said Audrey, with a sigh ; "and my aunt, who sees him every day, gives a sad account of his pale looks and bad spirits."

"The good lady is exceedingly kind to him, Andrey ; she appears to have quite forgiven him the offence of his strange proposal," observed John, with a smile, "I wonder if it it were love for Mrs. Dabney, that brought him so opportunely to Charliewood !"

"Hush ! here is my uncle :"

We omitted to say that at the commencement of this conversation, the sexton and Mrs. Ford had left the room, to visit the bedchambers, and inspect the new furniture. They now returned full of admiration at the neatness and order of the dwelling, and Jonathan bade his niece prepare to accompany him home ; "Mrs. Ford would remain," he said, "to get

supper for the Pages, and a girl had been hired to come in that night and take care of the dame till Audrey returned the next morning." Very reluctantly the young woman bade Johnnie good night ; she would fain have lingered to talk of Basil, but she feared her uncle might be displeased if she refused to accompany him, and laden with thanks and blessings from John, whose heart overflowed with gratitude for their kindness, the sexton and his niece took their departure.

Jonathan looked a little melancholy as he turned to close the gate after them.

"It's a neat place, lassie," he said, "a very neat place, but it puts me sadly in mind of old times. I could have fancied I saw poor Mary's face smiling by the hearth again, and heard Kate's merry laugh as it used to ring in those days through the little room. I have never stood within it but once before, since your father's death, and that was as chief mourner

to your mother. They are all in the church-yard now—all save poor Tom.”

Audrey passed her hand within the old man's arm, and pressed it tenderly.

“Where was my poor father buried—where did he die?” she asked, in a sad low voice.

“Hast never heard, my child? Nay now I remember poor Kitty feared it would grieve you while you were little, but now you are a young woman, it is time you knew all about it.”

And in solemn phrase the sexton related the singular disappearance of poor Tom.

“We think he was shot by gamekeepers, as as your aunt heard a gun go off; but if so, they carried the body away with them, or hid it so cleverly that it never was found. Some people said he owed the squire money, and ran away, but that I never would and never will believe.”

Audrey listened to this mournful story with

deep emotion ; she appeared now first to become acquainted with her father, and she asked many questions about him, all of which Jonathan, touched by a compunctious visiting that he had not not been reconciled to the poor fellow before his death, answered in terms of affectionate commendation. The conversation lasted till they reached the cottage, and it left on Audrey's mind, a strange conviction that Tom still lived ; a hope—very vague and ill grounded, but natural to her sanguine temperament—that this nearest and dearest of relatives might still be restored to her. She stole away from her uncle as they reached the threshold of their home, for she was in no mood to encounter Mrs. Dabney, and betook herself to her favorite spot for quiet or solemn thought—the church-yard. There, seated beside her mother and aunt's grave, she reflected on all she had heard, and conjured from the mystery attending her father's fate, a wondrous future. Her tears fell fast nevertheless, for her

mother's broken heart and early grave, and she grieved that her dear aunt Catherine should have kept this secret from her ; that on it alone there had never been, never could be now, sympathy between them.

She lingered long in the hushed church-yard, but at length her aunt's sharp voice was heard calling her over the gate, and she reluctantly obeyed the summons. She found supper waiting, and Mrs. Dabney exceedingly cross and ill-natured. She evidently considered herself greatly injured by the long absence of her husband and niece, which had, she said, "prevented her from paying a friendly visit to Mr. Findelkind, who had doubtless thought her very unkind," and she avenged her involuntary home-keeping by incessantly annoying both culprits to the best of her power and ability. There are few generous actions that do not bring their own reward with them ; and Audrey already foresaw the great additional comfort she might expect in the peaceful

hours of toil, beyond the reach of Mrs. Dabney's clamours that awaited her in her mother's old home.

But those strange tidings of her father that had reached her ear through Jonathan, how they banished every other thought! Her dreams were haunted by his image in every possible place, and she woke with an ardent and irrepressible longing to seek, throughout the world, him who she could not believe had found a grave in the Charliewood copses.

Her busy brain full of this great mystery, she hurried to her school, pausing before the lodge however with a strange feeling, as if she expected to see her mother's face smiling at her through the sunshiny panes—John gave her a smiling greeting.

"I have news for you, Audrey," he said, "great news."

"What can they be?"

"Oh, one has only to wish for a thing, to have it when good fairies are in the case."

“Nonsense, Johnnie. How you always keep on about those old stories. What has happened?”

“Well, don’t be impatient; but last evening, almost directly after you were gone, who should come to see us but Prince Findelkind.”

“I am so glad. He must then be quite well.”

“He looks pale and delicate as might be expected, after his contest with the salamanders, but he is a right royal prince, I assure you. He brought us some partridges, and insisted on our having them for supper. Mrs. Ford cooked them, he staid and supped with us, and afterwards remained with me whilst poor Granny was going to bed. We had a pleasant evening, lacking only your presence.”

“And setting aside your gratitude, Johnnie, you like him very much, don’t you?”

She looked with earnest eyes into his face.

“Yes; setting aside my endless obligation even,” he replied, gravely, “I think him one

of the finest of human creatures. We had a long, long talk Audrey, and he left me full of admiration and regard for him. I had good cause to be jealous when I measure myself by him, but he is so loving and gentle, and simple hearted, that such an evil passion will not stand beside his image."

"I wish he had not written that wicked letter to my uncle's wife," sighed Audrey.

"I don't believe he did ; it was some stupid blunder, as you'll find out in due time."

Their chat was now interrupted by the entrance of two or three of the young school-mistress's future pupils, and Audrey, with a slight assumption of matronly gravity which John thought very pretty, took her seat beside the dame's chair ; the old woman looking on, and fancying she was again teaching. The whole of the former school soon re-assembled, and the children who loved Audrey greatly, strove to obey and please her with all their little skill.

Matters therefore went on smoothly, John overlooked the sums, and heard some of the lessons, and both strove to raise the teaching a little above the dame's former standard, winning the children to listen to much pleasant lore, and ruling them with soft and gentle words. Audrey would have been sorry, at eventide, to leave off her pleasant task, so infinitely preferable to the harsh discords of her home, if she had not remarked that John looked pale and languid, and that a profound expression of sadness rested on his face. She had observed it at times all day, and ascribed it to his natural sorrow at his grandmother's affliction, thus inevitably forced upon his constant observation, and she lingered for a while after her little scholars were gone, to try and cheer him, but with no effect. He did not appear to desire her stay either, but glanced uneasily at the clock, and remarked that he did not like her to be late in those lonely roads. Audrey took the

hint and wished him good evening ; he pressed the hand she extended tenderly, and said, in a voice of emotion—

“ God bless you sweet little Audrey, and reward you for your goodness to my grandmother, and her helpless cripple. And He will doubtless do so.”

There was something so strangely solemn in his tone, and the words sounded so like a farewell, that the young girl was touched by them, and could scarcely restrain her tears. As she walked slowly down the shady road in the soft sunset, they still rang on her ear, and with them came a return of those thoughts about her lost father, which had fled before the busy life of day.

She was plunged in a melancholy reverie, when her progress at the very loneliest part of the road was checked by a hand laid suddenly on her shoulder, and a voice whispering close beside her—

“ Audrey !”

CHAPTER II.

AUDREY turned, startled, but not alarmed ; for she had instantly recognised the soft low tones as those of Findelkind, and there he stood beside her, his handsome face glowing with pleasure, his eyes sparkling with affection. She murmured some words of pleasure at seeing him again, and extended her hand. He took it and retained it in his own.

“Audrey,” he said, “I wish for a few moments’ undisturbed conversation with you,

for I have to explain a strange mistake, which has threatened to make me very unhappy. Will you turn back with me and hear it?"

She knew, even as he spoke, what that mistake was; but she put on a pretty air of wonder as she complied with his request, though all the time her cheeks rivalled with their rich blushes, the red roses of Damascus. And still retaining her hand, Basil led her down the shady lane, relating in his broken language the strange and comic error by which his letter to Audrey fell into the hands of her aunt, and his own distress at receiving the answer to it. Here he drew from his pocket the missive in question, and Audry was glad to conceal her confusion by reading it. One of her merriest laughs followed its perusal; for all its absurdities of style, and spelling were perceptible to her, and as she returned it to Basil, she reproached him for thinking she *could* have written such stuff.

“I am but a poor country girl,” she added, “it is true, but I know better how to write an ordinary letter than Miss Dumbledore’s pupil, it appears. And then from me, such a reply would have been quite cruel and heartless.”

“I wronged you, by believing it for a moment to be yours,” he said earnestly, “it is my second offence against your excellence. Can you forgive me?”

“Of course ; it was scarcely possible that you should suspect the truth.”

“And will you *now* answer my unlucky letter, Audrey?”

There was just an instant’s pause, and then she said tremulously.

“I ought to be sorry that you love me but I cannot.”

“And why sorry, dearest?”

“Because I cannot be your wife ; you must forget me.”

“Audrey, is it possible?”

“I cannot leave my uncle ; my promise binds me to be always near enough to go to him if he wished it.”

“You shall dwell in England, even here—if you wish it, till his death.”

Her eyes filled with tears.

“You are very good to sacrifice your natural wish to return to your own land for my sake,” she said, “but other lives also now bind me to England. My uncle is an aged man, and in the common course of nature, may die before I do ; but there are dame Page and Johnnie also—oh, even for your sake, I could not leave poor Johnnie, I know he would pine to death if I did. He has no other dear friend now.”

“My sweet, kind Audrey,” he exclaimed, “how I love you for so unselfishly thinking of and caring for others. But John cares for your happiness more than for his own. He wishes you to become my wife. It is to him I owe the discovery I have made of my letter’s

miscarriage. He bade me meet you here, that I might see you alone."

"Ah, then, that is why he has been so sad all day. He thought I should leave him all alone in the world. Poor, good John! Basil, you would not have me desert him?"

"No, dearest, nor will I. If you are my wife, John shall be my brother; we will take care of him always; and by-and-by, when you have no other ties to England, we will carry him back with us to my own Tyrol."

Audrey felt bewildered by her happiness; but she had still another care.

"Your mother, Basil, she is old also; dare I thus deprive her of her son?"

"Bless you for thinking of her—of my dearest mother," he said, with emotion; "but, Audrey, she loves me, she desires my happiness; she will consent to let me bring her with me to England, to dwell with my wife till we may all again journey to the mountains. Have you yet another 'no,' Audrey?"

She answered him by a happy smile ; and there, in the rosy sunset, almost beneath the windows of her mother's home, our Audrey plighted her troth to the stranger from the distant mountains.

They lingered sometime longer ere she bent her steps homeward, arranging how they might best communicate their secret to the Dabneys, and win Jonathan's consent to their union.

Audrey rightly anticipated a storm of wrath from her aunt's offended vanity, when the mistake of the letter should be explained, and dreaded mentioning the subject herself ; it was, therefore, finally resolved that Basil should himself speak to Jonathan the next day, inform him of the mistake, and ask his approval of their betrothal. Audrey insisted, however, that Basil should return to the Tyrol, and bring his mother to England before they married ; and very reluctantly he consented to her wish.

During part of this conversation, they had

been pacing up and down near the lodge, and twice, the near footstep of the Tyrolese and the indistinct sound of Audrey's voice had reached John Page's ear through the open casement. He held a book in his hand; but he did not read; he could not resist listening for their footsteps, and when they altogether retreated, and every sound died away in the distance, the poor cripple, who guessed too well the certain issue of the conference, turned his head on his pillow, and wept. He was roused from his indulgence of sorrow by his grandmother's hand in his hair; the poor old woman had seen his tears, and came to soothe him; but her feeble and childish consolations did but embitter his grief.

"Alone," he murmured, "all alone in the world henceforward. Poor granny, you too will have a heavy miss of her."

But he was not suffered to go to rest feeling thus desolate. Half an hour hence, and Audrey, blushing and smiling, all kindness

and sisterly tenderness, entered, and sat by his side, and took the poor lad's hand in hers, and told him how Basil would be a brother to him, and she, all her life long, the same Audrey she had ever been; and then she thanked him for all the happiness he had brought about, and for all the love he had shown her. It was rather an incoherent account she gave of their arrangements and plans for the future; but John understood it all, and it consoled him to think that she would not be parted from him, though he could not, all at once, master the jealousy of his own vain affection.

Early the next morning, Basil called at the cottage. Unfortunately, Jonathan happened to have been summoned to the rectory, and the young man found only Mrs. Dabney at home. It was the first time they had been alone, hitherto, as either Mrs. Ford, or some other of her village friends, had always accompanied the sexton's wife on her visits to the invalid.

Findelkind apologised for his intrusion by saying he wished to speak to Mr. Dabney.

“And also,” he added, with native courtesy, “to thank you, madam, for your great kindness to me, which was quite undeserved and unexpected.”

Mrs. Dabney bridled and smiled.

“Oh,” she said, “after the foreign education, which (I may say) I received, of course I am not likely to be prudish, and now my first emotions are over, I must say, I can’t but feel flattered by your regard, monsieur, and indeed,”—here she hesitated and looked down—“if ever I *should* be a disconsolate widow—”

Basil would not allow her to finish; he interrupted her eagerly—

“I have to beg one thousand pardons, madam,” he said, “for the strange mistake which has happened, with regard to a letter that fell into your hands. It was never in-

tended for you—I assure you ; I should not have so far presumed.”

Mrs. Dabney looked up in angry amazement.

“Your letter not intended for me !” she cried, shrilly, “why, Mr. Herr Findelkind, how can you say such a thing? Wasn’t it directed to me, and didn’t you propose to marry me after Mr. Dabney’s death, poor soul ?”

“Madam,” said the young man, in great confusion, “I assure you it was not directed to you, as, if you still have the unlucky letter, you may see.”

“But who else could be Mr. Dabney’s widow, I should like to know ?”

“Really,” said poor Basil, confused between the difficulty of his position and his slow command of English, “the letter was I doubt not very unintelligible ; I knew less of your tongue then ; but it was meant for the Fraulien, I mean for Mademoiselle Audrey.”

“Audrey!” screamed Mrs. Dabney, at the top of her shrill voice, which actually pained the sensitive musician, “Audrey! do you take me for a fool, sir, that you dare tell me such an impossible story!”

“It is true, I assure you—had I known more of your tongue—”

“*My* tongue! Good gracious me, was there ever such a monster—what have you ever heard about my tongue, sir? Is this my reward for all the nice things I made you, and all the kinds words you’ve had from me.”

“Nay, madam, I mean your language—your English.”

“Well, and that’s as good as madam Audrey’s any day, in spite of her being taught by the parson; but I see how it is, the artful little wretch has been poisoning your mind against me.”

“Nay, if you will let me explain—”

But Basil might as soon have hoped to

coax a cataract into hearing reason as Mrs. Dabney ; she broke in on his speech again—

“I want none of your explanations, you vile, deceitful, base, perjured man. I declare if I was n't married, I'd sue you for breach of promise—never was a poor woman so used.”

And touched by the sense of her injuries, Mrs. Dabney sobbed violently, and then fell into hysterics. Basil was dreadfully alarmed ; it was the first time he had seen such a feminine exhibition—hysterics not being prevalent or fashionable amongst the shepherdesses of the Alps—and he scarcely knew what to do. He called the little girl, who had taken Audrey's place in the house, and procured some water ; but Mrs. Dabney was resolved *not* to be revived, and answered every effort to compose and soothe her, by a fresh fit of screams, moans, struggles, and demoniac sounding laughter.

In the midst of the hubbub, Jonathan returned. He stood, for a few seconds, in silent

amazement, and Basil answered his looks by endeavouring to explain the cause of the strange scene ; but his words were drowned by Mrs. Dabney's screams, who, opening her eyes, and beholding her husband, fell into another paroxysm, calling in a piteous tone on Jonathan ; the poor bewildered sexton hastened to her side, and grasping his arm with one hand, whilst she pointed with the other towards Basil, she gasped forth—

“ Send him away ! The monster ! send him out of my sight.”

“ Why, Annette, my dear, sure you don't know what you do ; 'tis your good friend, Hurr Fiddlekin.”

Fresh cries of—“ Send him away—send him away ; he is an imposter, a cheat ; the sight of him kills me !”

“ Dear, dear,” said Jonathan, looking in blank perplexity, “ what does it all mean, Hurr ?”

“ It means,” replied Basil, “ that I have

been so unfortunate as to offend Mrs. Dabney. When she is better, she will tell you in what manner ; and then perhaps you will allow me to explain, and also to speak with you on an affair of consequence. Meantime, I will bid you adieu."

And bowing courteously to the sexton, Basil retreated, Mrs. Dabney's shrieks still ringing in his ears, till he reached the wicket. He paused when at a little distance from the cottage in great vexation.

"My poor Audrey !" was his first thought, "what misery now awaits her in her home, caused, by my rash confidence in that angry idiot. I dread the suffering to which this woman's jealousy will expose her ! Poor child ! I cannot and will not leave her to such a fate, whilst I take a distant journey ; she must become my wife at once."

And loving Audrey all the better, as he thought of the home trials which she bore so cheerfully, and pleasing his kind heart

by fancying how happy *he* would make her, he walked rapidly in the direction of the lodge, (for it was necessary to tell her at once of Mrs. Dabney's anger,) and rapped at the door for admittance. A buzz of young voices within told him that she was busied with her pupils, and answering her "come in" by only half opening the door, and asking if he could speak with her, for a moment, he waited her coming forth just within the shrubbery, which branched off from the lodge-gate. In less than a minute she stood beside him, looking pale and nervous.

"Well, Basil, what says my uncle?"

"Nothing, poor man!" he answered, with an irrepressible smile, as he thought of that worthy's perplexed countenance.

"Nothing?"

"No, sweet, he knows nothing as yet, for, unhappily, he was not in the house when I reached it. I saw Mrs. Dabney instead."

“My aunt! oh, Basil!”

“Oh, Basil, indeed, my Audrey! for your unlucky Basil has been very foolish, and brought a gathering tempest about his head, and—he fears—yours.”

And he related his interview with the sexton’s wife, adding, as he observed Audrey’s terrified look,

“But it will all come right, love; I shall explain it clearly to your uncle.”

She shook her head, and answered sadly.

“No, Basil, I am afraid not; at least, not if Mrs. Dabney invents any story. My uncle is a kind man, but he is very slow to understand, and when once anything is in his head, he never can be made to comprehend it differently. Oh! *that* was why I asked you to go, and early, and be sure to see him *first*!”

“I am very sorry,” said poor Basil; “but indeed I never thought that she—that Mrs. Dabney, would be so foolish. How *could* she

dream that I loved her ! But what are we to do, Audrey ? I can't bear you to go back and endure this vixen's temper ?”

“ Indeed, I shall be very much afraid to go home myself.”

There was a troubled pause.

“ What can I do, Audrey ? Shall I go back again ?”

“ No, Basil, oh, no ! Let *me* see my uncle first, and try to explain it all to him ; he will understand me more easily. But you must be sure to be in the lane or near the churchyard this evening, that I may be able to call you in.”

“ I will not leave you for a moment, to-day, Audrey.”

“ Yes, you must. You shall go back to your inn now, and dine, and come here again at four, when the children are gone, and walk home with me—I must go back to my duty now. Ah, Basil ! how terribly long the day will

seem ! and how shall I fix my thoughts on their little lessons whilst I am so anxious ?”

“I ought not to have told you,” he said, remorsefully, “I ought to have thought of that ! It was very selfish of me ; but I was so perplexed and distressed, that I came to you almost involuntarily. *Pray forgive me.”

“I hope,” she replied, very gently, “that you will always tell me of your distress, at least, if I can comfort you under it.”

He thanked her earnestly, and after a few minutes’ lingering, the pair parted with a promise to meet again at four o’clock.

CHAPTER III.

AGITATED by fear and anxiety, Audrey thought the hours that day had forgotten their swift flight. Repeatedly her eyes stole to the face of the dial, and she marvelled that only another minute had passed away. It was by an effort of no common self-denial that the good, conscientious girl strove patiently to explain some dull lesson or teach orally (as was her wont) some heavy, stupid child. It was a relief to her harassed mind when her pupils went home,

at twelve, to dinner ; and she could tell John, of her distress. He listened with his usual sympathy.

“I am sorry, Audrey,” he said, “that Mrs. Dabney will have the privilege of telling her story first ; she will do no end of mischief ; but don’t look frightened, darling ; it will all come right in the end, and if you love Prince Findelkind, you will not mind suffering a little for his sake. Will you, Audrey ?”

She answered him by a smile so full of happy tenderness that poor John, for an instant, closed his eyes, with a bitter pang at his heart.

“My good, dear Johnnie,” murmured her voice, close beside him, “how wise and kind you are ! how Basil and I love you.”

“I hope he will make you happy, Audrey.”

“Hope !” with a little reproach in her tone, “hope ! are you not sure, John ?”

“Yes—yes, of course ; I ought to be—I know he is brave, generous, and gentle.

God has given him good gifts. Besides, you love him, that is enough !”

“ Dear John !”

“ But at first, Audrey, I feared a little because he is a foreigner, and not of our Church—and—and—but it is of no use now to talk of all this.”

He paused for an instant, then resumed—

“ You could no where among the poor folks of Charliewood find your companion, and a meet help for you. It seems, almost, as if Heaven had sent this wandering minstrel, with his loving heart and sweet voice to make my Audrey happy.”

“ And you, too, Johnnie ; you will be happy with such a kind brother, such a strong protector.”

He answered her only by a sigh.

“ John, when shall we have dinner ?” asked the feeble old dame, who had not understood a word of their conversation. “ The children are all gone. Does Audrey stay with us to-

day ? Dear me, dear me, she helps me greatly with the children, I am sure I'm very much obliged."

Audrey sprang from her kneeling position beside John's couch, and hastened to get the noontide meal ready.

Four o'clock had struck. Once more the young schoolmistress was at leisure, and she sat, with her shawl and bonnet on, now glancing from the window, now at the hands of the clock. Basil was not come. "Where can he be?" was all her thought, but she talked of other things to John. The hands went faster now, as if to reproach Findelkind for his delay. It was actually a quarter past—half past—still he came not. At a quarter to five Audrey rose.

"I must go, Johnnie," she said, looking very pale and timid, "if he comes, tell him I waited."

There was something strangely plaintive in

her tone, John thought ; it gave him a chill feeling—a sentiment of foreboding.

With lingering and reluctant steps, poor Audrey wended her way homeward, hoping every minute to see Basil, but there was no sign of him, and with a sinking heart she unlatched the wicket, and prepared for a domestic storm.

The sexton was alone, seated at his solitary tea, and Audrey trembled when she saw the heavy lowering of his brows. Poor Catherine could have told her that it was even thus, he had looked, when first at enmity with her thoughtless father. She entered, and approached him timidly.

“Dear uncle, at tea by yourself? I am come just in time. Where’s my aunt?”

He turned a look of terrific, pompous wrath upon her.

“In bed, niece, very ill—thanks to you, and that vile Frenchman,” (all foreigners were

Frenchmen with Jonathan). “Ay! you may well look ashamed of yourself.”

“I am *not* ashamed of anything,” said Audrey, with a flash of her father’s spirit; “I have done nothing to be ashamed of.”

“Haven’t you, indeed? I suppose it’s no shame, then, to pick up with a wicked Roman Catholic—a gunpowder-plot fellow, who would blow us all up to-morrow if he dared—a villain who has been a-making love, too, to your lawful aunt, and my wedded wife. If that don’t make ye ashamed, I don’t know what will.”

“Indeed, dear uncle,” said Audrey, trying to speak calmly, while all the time her poor little heart was fluttering with indignation and alarm, “indeed, you have been misinformed. There was a very sad and foolish mistake made—”

“Mistake! no mistake at all—I saw the letter with my own eyes—and the rascal wished me dead in it, that he might marry my wife—”

“That letter was meant for *me*,” said Audrey, firmly.

“For *you*? oh! so *you* are to wish me dead, are you? and when you have my little savings he is to marry *you*—that’s it. Ain’t you ashamed to look me in the face, you cruel, ungrateful, perfidjus viper.” Jonathan waxed quite eloquent in terms of abuse. He felt as if he were actually gazing on some new sexton digging his grave. “But it is a lie, miss, though he may have made you believe it; (and cruel you were, too, for the thought!) I know the whole truth. He made love to my wife, and when he found she was a good, true, religious woman, and that she couldn’t abide to hear of my death,” here he groaned, and wiped his bald head with his handkerchief, “he pretended that he meant the letter for you, which was a’most as bad, considering that I have a’ been a father to you.”

“Dear, dear uncle, he never wished you dead. He only meant that he would not ask

me to leave you, whilst you were living—indeed he *knew* I would not—”

“And why not, pray?”

Jonathan was in the mood to quarrel with everything.

“Because I promised my poor aunt—”

Audrey, suddenly struck by the sense of her grievous loss in that dear aunt, burst into a passion of tears.

“Well,” said the sexton, softening a little, “that makes it a little better for you, but not for him—for as I said before, he has told you a lie about it, and it is all as I said at first. He made love to your aunt,” and Jonathan repeated word for word, the tale he had learned from Mrs. Dabney. It was very provoking. Audrey, however, began to hope when she saw his look relenting, and was about once more to endeavour at disabusing him, when Mrs. Dabney, supported by Mrs. Ford, (for whom the sexton had sent soon after Basil returned,)

entered the room. She did not dare leave Audrey too long alone with her uncle.

"She *would* come," said Mrs. Ford, in answer to Jonathan's looks, "she would come down, though indeed she ought to be in bed. But, perhaps, a cup of tea may do her good."

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Dabney, sinking into a chair—Ah!"

"How are you now, my dear wife?" asked the sexton."

"A little better—Ah! only very weak. I have taken a little of that good young man, Mr. Alton's *sal-volatile*. It did me good."

This name was a hint upon which Jonathan spoke.

"Audrey," he said, turning again to his niece, "I am in hopes, that now I have explained to you what a villain this Frenchman is, you won't be deceived by any lies, he has told you."

"My dear uncle," she replied, "Basil is no

villain. He is a good, honorable man. Do see him, do hear him yourself."

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Dabney, again.

"I won't do nothing of the sort," said Jonathan, sturdily, "he shall never darken these doors again—and it was very bad of *you*, to go listening to a stranger and a foreigner, as it seems you have. It wasn't to your credit at all, as a decent young woman. But, as your aunt says, it all comes of your reading profane play-books, instead of the Pilgrim's Progress. I would have thrown your book into the fire this very morning, if it hadn't been for my poor brother's name, on the inside of the cover."

Audrey trembled at the thought of her treasured inheritance's danger.

"It ruined your father and it will you, if I don't take care," continued the sexton, "so I have made up my mind now—your aunt and I have settled that you shall consent to marry Mr. Alton, who is a proper, respectable match

—has his sitting in church, and gives to the poor, and is quite the gentleman—and then we'll forgive you, and think no more of this Fiddlekin. Do you hear, girl."

"Yes, uncle, but I can't obey you." her voice was quite calm and steady now, "I CANNOT marry Mr. Alton. He is too good to be deceived. I love and am betrothed to Basil, and though I will never leave you without your consent, I may be wife to no other man."

Mrs. Dabney uttered a scream of anger.

"Did any one ever hear such a bold, shameless, wicked girl," she cried, in falsetto. "Is this all your gratitude to your kind uncle?"

Jonathan struck his clenched fist heavily on the table.

"I *will* be obeyed," he said, sternly, "I *will* have no foreigner or beggar in my family, for tho' poor, we've always been respectable; therefore, mark now, Audrey, if by to-morrow morning you don't consent to have Mr. Alton, or promise,

at least, never to see or speak to this fellow again (either before or *after* my death,) you shall leave my house for ever, and I'll never speak to you nor notice you again."

"Oh, uncle, uncle, don't say such cruel words."

"They ain't cruel words at all—go to your room and reflect on 'em, and learn to obey as you ought."

Audrey was glad to avail herself of this mandate, for she was perfectly overwhelmed by the terrible alternative presented to her. She sought her chamber, and there yielded to an agony of grief. She was roused from it, by good natured Mrs. Ford's entrance; that worthy woman brought her a cup of tea, and came, evidently, with the kind purpose of trying to reconcile her to her uncle's will. She had been greatly prejudiced against Basil, and she urged on Audrey the folly and sin of disobeying her friends for the sake of a foreigner who had made love to her aunt first.

“And who may have another wife in his own country for anything we know,” she added.

Audrey endeavoured, and, with some effect, to disabuse her ; it was no difficult task to convince Mrs. Ford that Mrs. Dabney’s vanity, aided by an unlucky accident, had deceived her ; but even after acquitting Basil of the letter, the good woman, strong in her prejudice against foreigners, was equally urgent with her young friend to give him up.

“If I did not know that my uncle has no just ground for his harshness ; if I were not sure that he is only an instrument for carrying out that woman’s jealous spite,” sobbed Audrey, “I would sacrifice my own and Basil’s happiness, for his sake ; and yet when I think that Basil will give up all for me—country, home, kindred—that he will care for my friends and love my cross uncle, because I do, how *could* I reward such generosity by betraying his trust in me.”

“Well, Audrey, you know how to talk, that’s sure,” said Mrs. Ford, looking a little puzzled, “but fine words are only empty breath. It’s your duty to obey; your catechism teaches you to do so, and I hope you will, in the end. I never could abide foreigners myself.”

And putting the tea on the table, she turned to leave the room.

“Stay one minute, good Mrs. Ford,” exclaimed the girl, “please do me a kindness. You pass the Crown going home; just let me scribble two lines to Basil and leave them for me, will you, dear, kind, Mrs. Ford?”

“Oh, indeed I can’t, Audrey. What would your uncle say if he knew I carried a love letter for you?”

“He never will know; he never shall. Oh, Mrs. Ford, you used to love me, and be very kind to me, don’t refuse me this one great favour.”

It was almost impossible for the person thus

adjured to say "no;" she never in her life could refuse to do a good natured action, or grant a favour to any one; and she was always the partizan of the one who last spoke a kind word to her; moreover, she really loved Audrey, and disliked Mrs. Dabney.

"Well, make haste then," she said, "it must be only two lines."

And Audrey, with a trembling hand, wrote a short note, imploring Basil to come to her at the lodge early the next morning. Mrs. Ford put it in her pocket, and promised to deliver it as soon as possible. She then returned to the sexton and his wife.

Audrey left wholly to her own sad thoughts, which were the more confused and painful because she had no distinct perception of her duty in her present strait, opened her lattice, which peeped out from the thatch, and looked eagerly in every direction, in hopes of seeing Basil in the neighbourhood of the cottage. But he was not there, nor did he come, though she sat looking

for him till sunset faded into twilight, and twilight deepened into night. To her other cause for grief was thus added a fear for him; what could have kept him from her but some accident or sudden illness. She remembered how he had suffered lately; how very recently he had been able to walk, and she trembled lest he was again confined to the house.

It was a night of agonised anxiety, bewilderment, and sorrow to our poor country girl, and when, at last, slumber closed her swollen eyelids, it stole upon her in the midst of tears.

CHAPTER IV.

Who knows what a day may bring forth, and who knows what a *sealed letter* may contain? Our destiny, now-a-days, travels about in the postman's bag.

When Basil Findelkind reached his inn after his interview with Audrey, he found a letter from Sir Philip Beaumont awaiting him, and opened it without fear or doubt of the nature of its contents. Alas! it contained only a few hurried lines, requesting Basil, if now

equal to travelling, to come with all possible speed to London, as Miss Beaumont was not expected to live a day, and his (Basil's) presence was greatly desired by Sir Philip.

"Come, I entreat you, and without delay," said the baronet at the conclusion.

There was no possibility of course of refusing this entreaty. Basil was shocked and troubled at the image of the radiant Helen on a deathbed; even for Audrey's sake, he would not defer, for an hour, the journey which gave him a chance of, perhaps, seeing her once more, or, at least, of consoling his beloved patron. He, therefore, sent off at once for post-horses, and meantime, wrote a long letter to Audrey, telling her of the necessity which drew him from her, and inclosing Sir Philip's note. He gave her his address, besought her to write to him immediately, and ended with fervent assurances of his truth and affection. Grown more cautious than of old, he posted this epistle

himself, directing it under cover, to John Page, lest it might be intercepted by Mrs. Dabney.

On reaching the Beaumonts' town-house, he found that Helen still lived, but the butler shook his head as he spoke of her.

"She is in a brain fever, Mr. Findelkind," he said, "and the doctors give no hopes. Poor Sir Philip is half dead with grief."

He hastened away to announce Basil's arrival, and, in a few minutes, Sir Philip entered the room. He extended his hand to his *protégé*.

"I am glad you are come, Basil," he said, endeavouring to retain his composure, "she is very, very ill; dying, I fear—the doctor is with her now. She has raved incessantly of you, and we think if she saw you, she might be soothed a little. I cannot thus destroy her;" he continued, with a quivering lip, "for her life I would sacrifice my own; it is nearly as bad—"

He checked himself, then added,

“In short, if she recovers, she shall be yours.”

Poor Basil ! he changed colour at the words, and looked greatly disturbed. Sir Philip observed his look of dismay and perplexity, and said, haughtily,

“Surely Miss Beaumont will not be rejected?”

“My dear, generous patron,” exclaimed the Tyrolese, “I dare not aspire to such a height of fortune, even had I a heart to give in exchange. But I am betrothed to a young girl already.”

A strange change of expression flitted across Sir Philip’s handsome features ; mortified pride—anger—secret satisfaction that the sacrifice he had meditated was impossible. He breathed heavily as Basil paused.

“Forget, then, that I have thus compromised my daughter’s delicacy,” he said, haughtily. “But it would have been well if you had, from the first, told us of your be-

trothal ; it would have saved me much grief and mortification."

"I have been betrothed only a day," replied Basil, mildly, "or I should have informed you of it, Sir Philip."

"And to whom?"

"To the young girl who took Julie's place at Crowhurst last year."

"My daughter is highly honoured, really ! so she has been rivalled by her waiting woman."

And Sir Philip paced the room with angry steps.

"Sir Philip," said Basil, firmly, "I never dreamed of the possibility of such an honour as your words imply. I should as soon have dared to love the moon as Miss Beaumont. Gratitude, reverence, humility all forbade the thought ; but it was not forbidden me to love my equal ; and I chose naturally where I might hope for success."

"You are right, Basil," said Sir Philip,

pausing, "you are right, I should have been equally displeased if you had presumed to love my Helen. And yet, to think that she could love vainly! That she *must* be miserable."

"Nay, my dear patron, it will not be! Miss Beaumont does not really love me, be sure; her words now are but the wanderings of a diseased fancy. She will recover to a long life of happiness, I trust."

The door opened, and the doctor entered.

"Is this the gentleman of whom we were speaking?" he said, bowing to Basil. "Glad to see you, sir. We deem it expedient to soothe, as much as possible, this poor young lady's delirium; will you oblige me by trying your present influence over her disordered fancy, and persuading her to take a medicine which neither the nurse nor myself can induce her to swallow?"

Basil glanced at Sir Philip.

“We will come with you, doctor,” said the father.

And they proceeded to the sick-room. Helen was lying supported by pillows, her dark hair loosened, and floating over her shoulders, her eyes brilliant, and her cheeks burning with fever.

“My love,” said Sir Philip, approaching her, “here is our old friend, Herr Findelkind, come to see you. Do you know him?”

“Basil,” she said, softly, “Basil!”

And she extended her hand. Its touch was scorching.

“You have come to save my life again, I know,” she continued, wildly, “you did on the mountains, you know. Now the danger is different. Listen,” she whispered, loudly, “they want to poison me!”

They shall not, believe me,” said Basil, gently. “Look, I have brought you a cool drink from the Tyrol; you will take it for my sake, will you not?”

“For your sake, oh yes,” and with a sweet smile she drained the bitter draught. Basil much moved, passed his hand across his eyes.

“You are weeping,” she said, quickly, “are you going away?”

“No, not unless you talk too much. You are ill, dear lady ; you must lie quite still and quiet, or they will send me hence.”

“I will indeed, then,” she said, “but sit where I may see you.”

He obeyed, and she remained quite quiet, her beaming eyes fixed on him, till the opiate she had drunk began to take effect, and the full lids dropped. After a while the doctor approached, looked at her and felt her pulse.

“She sleeps for the first time,” he said, “the pulse is lower ; there is hope of preserving both life and intellect. But you must remain near at hand Mr. Findelkind.”

And Basil did remain for nights and days in a neighbouring chamber, ready to obey every call of the physician or her father, who never

stirred from his daughter's dressing-room. Helen was always quiet, and soothed by the presence of Basil, would take any medicine he gave her, and obeyed his slightest wish. The power he thus possessed over her wildest delirium was of great importance. By degrees her sleep grew longer and deeper. The crisis came, and she woke sensible, though in the last degree of weakness.

Sir Philip's joy at the flight of the terrible fever, was tempered by the doubts of the physician as to Helen's strength rallying; her mother had dined of decline; he trembled for the trial of his child's constitution. He spoke much and earnestly of it to Basil.

"I shall take her abroad for the winter;" he said, "the soft climate of Italy will do something towards her recovery perhaps."

She did not see Basil after the recovery of her senses, and if she remembered his former presence it was probably only as a troubled dream; her attendants were strictly charged

not to inform her of his having thus visited her.

The Tyrolese still continued in the house at Sir Philip's request, though very anxious to return to Charliewood. One day Helen asked after him ; inquired where he was and what he was doing ; Sir Philip replied, that Basil was still in England, and he understood intended to carry an English wife back with him to the Tyrol. She grew for a moment a little paler than before, and after a short pause, said she hoped he would be very happy.

Nothing more passed on the subject, and Sir Philip trembled lest this bold experiment of crushing out hope and love at once, might prove too much for her feeble state : but the result proved he had acted wisely. The shock was in fact less felt by her on account of that very feebleness ; she had not strength to feel keenly. Reduced to the brink of the grave, her thoughts were no longer those of her proud health and triumphant beauty. Every emotion,

and all objects of reflection were mellowed and softened as it were by her weakness, and by the prostration of her intellectual power. The sharp teaching of a sick bed, borne for the first time, was not lost on her; memories from her early childhood floated back upon many an hour of languid half-repose; the holy words whispered round her cradle, the pious lessons of her first *Bonne* haunted the chamber of her convalescence; the din, the glare, the pride and vanity of the world were shut out of it, and the good angels of her childhood once more stood in the path of her life.

CHAPTER V.

JOHN PAGE duly received Basil's inclosure, and kept it for Audrey, who did not, however, reach the school that morning till after her little pupils were all assembled. When she did come, he was alarmed and surprised at seeing that her eyes were swollen and red with weeping, and her cheek pale. He whispered a hurried enquiry as to what had vexed her, and received a low voiced reply, "that her uncle was angry ; she would tell him more by-and-

bye !” Then he gave her the letter, and her countenance for a moment brightened as she read it. One anxiety was removed from her mind ; and she gathered fresh courage under her present trial from Basil’s assurances of affection, and his promise to write to her daily. But for this precious missive the poor girl would have found her task of teaching intolerable ; even as it was, an exclamation of thankfulness escaped her, when the eager little crowd issued buzzing from the room ; and turning to John, she added—

“For indeed, Johnnie, I have so much to vex me, I could scarcely think of anything else.”

“Is Mr. Dabney so very angry ?”

“Ah, yes, terribly, cruelly angry. He insists on my giving up Basil and marrying young Alton, or he says he will never see me again willingly, nor ever speak to me more.”

“My poor Audrey ! What will you do ?”

“Not vex Basil—not make him unhappy,”

she said, earnestly, "be faithful to him, and try to be patient. My uncle is unjust, and acts only by the will of Mrs. Dabney; aunt Katie never meant me to obey her. If he casts me from him I cannot help it. He no longer needs my care or services, I cannot stay with him against his will."

"It is a happy thing for Basil then that your uncle opposes your marriage so unfairly."

"Ah, and for me too, and therefore I fear lest I may not clearly see my duty. Dear Johnnie, do advise and guide me."

She leaned down and looked beseechingly in his face. His voice as he answered, was not quite steady.

"Audrey, no duty ties you to obey your uncle, when he would counsel you to do evil. It would be a sin to marry Alton whilst you love another; an injustice to sacrifice Basil's happiness to Mrs. Dabney's mortified vanity and falsehood. Your uncle scarcely can be called a free agent in this matter; and had

your aunt Kate lived, I am certain she would have approved of your marriage with one willing to sacrifice every earthly consideration for your sake."

"But what shall I do if my uncle drives me from his house?"

"*Our* home will be yours—do we not owe it to you Audrey? till Basil can take you to his own."

And thus it ended. Jonathan was deaf to his niece's entreaties and reasoning; he would hear of no denial of his will. Mrs. Dabney never ceased a vindictive warfare of reproaches and insults—and it was in some sort, therefore a relief to the object of them, when her uncle formally desired her to quit his house. If Mr. M'Coy had still been rector of Charlewood, it is unlikely that Jonathan would have proceeded to such lengths, but as it was, he was wholly under the influence of an evil woman, and all his better feelings withered beneath it. With a sad heart our poor Audrey packed up her

little wardrobe, and removed to the lodge; it was painful to be thus expelled from the home of her childhood and youth, and exposed to the wonder and scandal of the village, but she tried to bear it cheerfully for the sake of John Page, who strove with all his power to soothe her, and amuse her mind.

The news soon spread, and, as it was disseminated by Mrs. Dabney, reports greatly to the disadvantage of Audrey floated about. "She must," rumour said, "have acted very badly, to have driven her good uncle, who had been so kind to her from her birth, to such, unusual harshness." An obscure, confused, and disgraceful story formed from Mrs. Dabney's tale of Basil's proposal to herself, grew daily more current. The village mothers became unwilling to commit their children to Audrey's care; one by one they were removed; and at the end of a month not one of the little school remained. It was not the least distressing part of this desertion that the rector made in-

quiries into its cause, and the poor young schoolmistress had to render an account to him of the conduct of which she was accused. His mind was prejudiced against her by Mrs. Dabney's assurances that Audrey had only taken the school that she might have an opportunity of meeting the unprincipled foreigner ; and by having been permitted to see the letter which she (Mrs. Dabney,) still declared he had written to herself.

It has been well said that—

“ Truth is strange,
Stranger than fiction.”

How often are all the appearances, signs, and tokens of probability on the side of falsehood. How often does truth wear the semblance of a lie. In this instance it was so ; Basil's unlucky letter appeared ample evidence against him ; the fact of his engagement with Audrey beginning at the very commencement

of her benevolent labours, confirmed the other scandal; and her obstinacy in clinging to a stranger, a foreigner, one of another church, (a fact which was very offensive to the rector) increased his inclination to misjudge her. Her explanation appeared therefore the most inconsistent and improbable possible; and he told her coldly at its close, that as there must be a village school, and as it appeared the only way of supporting dame Page, he must request her to seek a situation for herself, and he would place some one else in her stead as schoolmistress in the lodge.

“The house, rent-free,” he said, “and the prospect of the entire possession of the profits of the school as soon as the old dame dies, will make any good steady young woman willing to take it. And if you really care for the well-being of your friends, you will see the necessity for this change, and submit to it cheerfully.”

“Cheerfully! ah, sir, to leave every body I

know and love, to be so disgraced ; who would take me in either, with so much against me ?”

And Audrey clasped her hands, pale with despair.

“ Then give up this fellow as you ought, and go back to your uncle, who has been a father to you ;” said the Rector.

“ Indeed I cannot ! Oh, sir, pray write to our last good clergyman and ask him, he will tell you that I am an honest well-meaning girl.”

“ If so, let your deeds prove it. Return to your home, and obey those who are set over you.”

She answered only by her tears.

Displeased and disappointed in her, the gentleman withdrew. John Page had once or twice confirmed her statements and tried to plead for her, but the Rector gently silenced him, saying he must learn the whole truth from Audrey herself.

When he was gone, Audrey overwhelmed with grief and shame, sank weeping by John's side ; he strove to comfort her by reminding her of Basil.

"He will soon come back now, dear," he said, "it is five weeks since he went away, and you know he wrote you word yesterday that Miss Beaumont was better. Have you told him all you have suffered for his sake Audrey?"

"Ah, no ! it would have grieved him, and made him unwilling to stay with poor Sir Philip. He does not know a word about it. But now he must. Oh, John, what shall I do?"

And throwing her little apron over her head, she yielded to a perfect passion of tears. At that moment the latticed window was darkened by a shadow, John turned to see what it could be, and beheld the face of Basil smiling in on him.

“Audrey!” he cried joyfully, “no more tears; he is here!”

Almost the next instant Basil was beside her.

The joy that followed!—how it put out by its radiance the dull fires of sorrow and perplexity—how the clouds of doubt and anxiety fled before it! John *would* tell all the poor girl had endured, in spite of her imploring looks; he knew how much dearer it would make her to Findelkind; and Basil listened with mingled indignation, and pity, and grateful love.

“And you concealed all this from me!” he said, tenderly, “If I had had the least thought of it, I should have left Sir Philip immediately, to come to you, my kind, gentle Audrey but I will never leave you again. You must at once become my wife. I will write to Sir Philip, and ask him to certify to the Rector that I am an honest man. Nay, I

will see Mr. Melton, to-night ; I think he had once a friendship for me."

"But Mrs. Dabney showed *him* also that unhappy letter, and prejudiced him against you."

"Well, it shall soon be right again. Mean-time be comforted, my dear Audrey."

"And how is that queenly young lady?" asked John, anxious to change the current of Audrey's thoughts.

"Much better, though still weak and delicate. Sir Philip goes abroad with her in a few days."

"Did you see her, Basil, before you left?" asked Audrey.

He coloured slightly.

"Not immediately before I left, dear ; I did some little time back. She sees no one now ; quiet is of the first importance for her."

"Just now," said Audrey, hesitatingly, "when Mr. Melton told me I must get a situation, I thought of applying to my dear

Miss Beaumont; I am sure she would have believed and trusted me."

"She would indeed," replied Basil, "but there is no occasion for you to ask any one's aid now; you are under *my* care henceforward."

And Basil acted with a spirit and energy which soon set matters right with the squire, and partially satisfied Mr. Benbow, who, in truth, thought the whole affair "a bore," and was glad to get it over. Sir Philip wrote to both gentlemen in the highest terms of his *protegé*, and Mr. Melton in consequence undertook to endeavour at reconciling Jonathan to the match. The sexton was, however, invulnerable; he had made up his mind he said, "and would not change it for King George himself. He was a free-born Englishman, paid his taxes and his debts, had a bit of money in the Saving's Bank, and thought he had a right to rule his own family. The girl was one and twenty past, or he would have forbid

her banns. As it was, he wouldn't have anything to do with the matter. He washed his hands of it."

Audrey would not be married at her own old church, because it would have vexed her uncle to be either present or absent in his official capacity; nay, so sadly did she feel her disobedience even to that perverse and unreasonable and misguided will of his, that she would have refused to marry Basil, had she been sure of getting even a servitude which would support her; but the malice of Mrs. Dabney thwarted itself. Her falsehood, in a manner, compelled Audrey to seek protection from Basil. The poor bride coaxed Mrs. Ford to go with her to the next country town, and to let Phœbe be her brides-maid; and young Morgan, John's friend also lent his presence, and acted as father to the girl. It was not a joyous bridal, but Findelkind endeavoured to be "father, mother, and brother," to the deserted one to whom he pledged his faith, and

she found almost entire consolation during the solemn ceremony in the gentle kindness of her husband's countenance, and her trust in his goodness and truth.

Findelkind thought it better that his wife should not reside at Charliewood; at least, not for the present. Time, he said, would do much towards softening Jonathan, and reconciling him to them, and it would also efface the unjust impressions and prejudices, to which Mrs. Dabney had given rise, in the village. His engagements called him northwards, and he proposed that Audrey, John Page, and his grand-mother should go with him; take up their residence in the outskirts of York, and there remain till matters improved at the sexton's cottage, or Findelkind's pursuit of his profession made a change desirable. They could travel very slowly, resting often by the way, and he doubted not that John's health would improve by the change.

Thus it was finally settled.

About a week after Audrey's marriage, the little party left Charliewood for the North of England. John Page rejoiced alike in the delightful and undreamed of change of scene and his Audrey's happiness; the dame was pleased as a child, at going on a journey, and "riding in a coach," as she phrased it; and Audrey content for the dear sake of her gentle and generous husband, to wander forth where and how he would.

By a strange coincidence, that very same day, Sir Philip Beaumont and his daughter quitted England for the continent. Helen was, of course, as yet, ignorant of Basil's marriage. Her father never named him to her, and no daily paper recorded the fact that the popular Tyrolese was a Benedict.

CHAPTER VI.

LEAVING our bridal pair and their companions to form a new home in the North, we must now beg our reader to accompany us to the Common Hard, Portsea, a very different scene from the quiet village, which has hitherto formed the back ground of our sketches. The guns of the garrison, batteries, and flag ship had just announced the hour of sunset, and every flaunting flag had sunk simultaneously at the sound ; the sky wore the bright, red hue of a

frosty evening, and threw the same pleasant colour on the tall masts and rigging of the ships, that lay at anchor off the Hard, a flat shore on the eastern side of the harbour. The beach, and the wide pavement before the houses which face the sea, were all busy and alive with moving forms. Here, the watermen, still hoping for a fare, stood by their wherries, striking their arms across their brawny chests to keep them warm, and turning an intelligent eye upon the symptoms of the weather; there, by the railings which bound the Hard sea-ward, were gathered groups of men-of-war's men talking together, or fish-women, by their booths, smoking short pipes, and enjoying their evening gossip; whilst almost in the midst of these groups, surrounded by a party of merry rather than reverent listeners, a ranter standing on a tub was preaching with great vehemence.

Along the pavement, officers in uniform were passing to and fro to Portsmouth or to the

Dockyard, between which places this thoroughfare runs ; or Jews, (for many inhabit the spot) distinguished by their bearing and unmistakable physiognomy, were wending their way homewards.

The houses consisted principally of shops, and small taverns—but the latter were most abundant, and generally announced themselves, by means of painted boards or printed papers, as the rendezvous of the sailors of some individual vessel. To one of these, exhibiting the announcement of—“Rendezvous for the seamen of H. M. Ship St. Vincent,” we must now introduce the reader. From it, as from most of the others, proceeded the sound of a fiddle, and the clatter of noisy feet, betraying the early revelry of great part of a ship’s company just paid off, after a long absence from their native land. Seated in the bay window of a parlour up-stairs, from which he could command a view of the harbour, and of the life-teeming scene we have described, was a man

of about fifty years of age, dressed as an ordinary seaman. Though somewhat weather-beaten in appearance, he was nevertheless a very good-looking person. His quick blue eyes sparkled with animation, and his well cut mouth wore an habitual smile. He held a telescope in his hand, through which he amused himself with gazing at the vessels and boats in the harbour ; or, at times, hanging it down beside him, he listened with a good-natured smile, full of kindly sympathy, to the sounds proceeding from below stairs. But a noise of approaching coach-wheels suddenly met his ear, and with an expression of anxious expectation he opened the window and bent out.

There was the Regulator driving round the Hard, in all the glory of its sleek four-in-hand, the handsome and popular coachman nodding and smiling to his numerous acquaintance as he slowly advanced, restraining his impatient steeds. A handsome

young seaman, mounted on the top of the stage-coach, detected at once the anxious face protruded from the Keppel's Head window, and greeted his comrade with a cheer and the waving of a gorgeous yellow handkerchief.

The stage-coach drew up at the inn door, and the sailor, alighting, was in a few minutes, exchanging a hearty greeting with our friend at the window.

"Well, Jack," asked the latter, "what news have you for me? Is the girl living?"

"Ay, ay, Tom, hale and hearty, and spliced the week before I reached the place."

"Married!" exclaimed Tom, "to whom?"

"Why, do you see, it isn't a very pleasant story, as I've got to tell, so I hope you won't take it too much to heart."

"I'll try and bear whatever you have to tell like a man, Jack—but, for Heaven's sake, tell me quickly."

"Well, I went, as you bade me, to the Crown, and asked about the Dabneys. They

told me you was dead and gone—knocked on the head by poachers—eh, eh !—that your wife was dead also, and that your brother, the sexton, had taken your little girl and brought her up ; all which you and I know'd afore. Then I axed how the lass was a going on, and they told me she was spliced a week ago to a Frenchman—a *Tyrolese*—I think they called him ; one of them fellers as goes about long-shore, with a grinder organ or hurdy gurdy, as they calls it. As was likely, Master Sextant didn't like the match, 'cos first, the chap was a foreigner, and next, he'd 'a made love to Mrs. Sextant before he took up with her niece."

" Good Heaven !" exclaimed Tom Dabney, " what could the girl have been thinking of ? My poor Mary, it is well you are not alive to bear all this trouble !"

" She must be a silly baggage, axing your pardon, Tom, to have took up with a foreign *parley-vous*, instead of with an Englishman.

And they told me, she might have married the doctor's mate, if she'd have had him ; a likely looking chap too ; but no, nothing would do for her but the grinding fellow, who wanders about all over the world with monkeys and white mice. Old Dabney was very angry, and so was his wife ; they wouldn't have nothin' to do with her, if she would have him—and have him she would. So they made a sort of a stolen match of it, and he has a taken her away with him to his own country, with a crippled lad, and an old, silly woman."

Tom Dabney's wrath at this relation was extreme. He poured forth a volley of oaths against poor Basil, his supposed grinder, and imaginary monkeys and mice ; and raved at his daughter's folly. His messmate suffered him to give free vent to his anger, and then, as the best consolation under such circumstances, "went below," as he called it, and ordered up grog and pipes. On his return from this

friendly expedition, he found Tom pacing the room as he might the quarter-deck, with a changed and very sorrowful expression of countenance.

“That poor girl, Jack,” he said, as he seated himself, and mixed a glass of grog, “I am very unhappy about her. Just as I could have provided a home for her, too! I can’t make out how it was that Jonathan and Kate ever let her get acquainted with an organ-man. My brother used to be choice of his company.”

“Well, there’s no knowing how girls pick up a sweetheart,” replied Jack, seriously, “them women always is a puzzle to me. But how come it, that you did not keep a look out after the wench yourself, at such times as you was in England?”

“Why, just for this reason. I couldn’t keep her comfortable, or give her such a respectable home as my brother could, so I didn’t like to take her away from him and her

good aunt, who was, as I heard, a mother to her. Jonathan wouldn't speak to nor notice me, I knew, and, perhaps, if he had known I was alive, he would not have allowed Kitty to take care of my girl, so I let them think me dead for her sake. But now that I am a warrant officer, and have a good sum in hand—five years pay, you know—and could have maintained her, I yielded to the yearning I have always felt towards my poor little deserted Audrey, and employed your kind aid to seek her out, and tell her of her father's existence, and of his wish to fulfil his duty to her."

"Well, you are unlucky in your children, I will say," exclaimed Jack, "there was poor little Mary dead when you last came into port, and now this one as good as dead, and, may be, you'll never see *her* again."

"Both motherless children, poor things," said Tom, mournfully, "and both, therefore, neglected—for if Audrey's mother (my first

wife) had lived, she would have watched over her daughter, and not allowed her even to *know* a tramp such as she's married, and so, if my second wife had not died, my little Mary might have been alive yet. But I've been a sad, idle dog in my time, Jack, and thus I'm punished."

Tom passed his hand across his eyes, which were now dimmed with tears, and Jack, in sympathy, used his yellow handkerchief with extraordinary vehemence.

"But," continued Tom Dabney, "I'll now do my duty to Audrey to the best of my power—I shall go and seek after her, see what sort of a chap her husband is, and try and persuade him to settle down to some honest calling in England. You asked his name, of course?"

"To be sure," replied Jack, with dignity, "it is Fiddlekin."

"And he left England a week ago?"

“More nor ten days now.”

“Where was he going?”

“To the Tyrol—some part of France, I take it.”

Tom gave a groan.

“The seeking them will be like sailing on unknown seas without a chart,” he said, “it it a great chance if I ever find them.”

“Shall you give chase with so little to direct your course, Tom.”

“Ay,” he replied, “what else have I to do? It is all that’s left me now; I have sown my wild oats, as they say, Jack, and reaped a bitter harvest from them.”

“Well, if so be as it’s agreeable to you, Tom, I’ll go with you. I’m as flush of cash as you are a’ most, spite of the allotment to my poor old mother, and I should like for to go to foreign parts *by land*. Not to speak of wishing to show you that I ain’t ungrateful for all your kindness to me since I entered

the service. You've been a father to me, Tom, and I'll be a son to you—hang me if I won't."

Tom Dabney expressed the most lively gratitude for this friendly offer of the young sailor, and the two, at once, with seaman-like promptitude, began to arrange their plans for setting out on this wildest of searches, which a sober landsman would scarcely have imagined.

Whilst they are thus occupied, we will explain to the reader how it was that Tom, from a peaceful gardener, had become a smart man-of-war's-man. His disappearance, we grieve to say, was voluntary—in fact, Tom absconded from his home. The good-natured, thoughtless fellow had become bail for one of his old wild associates to an amount which would have ruined him. On his way home from the Crown on the night in which we introduced the Dabneys to our reader, he had been met and stopped by that very individual, about to fly from England for ever. He came,

however, first to Charliewood, to give Tom warning to get out of the way, till he should be able (as he could and would do) to send him the forfeited money ; Tom was too good-natured to oppose his friend's flight, even at the risk of being himself a sufferer, and he was easily, therefore, persuaded to accompany his comrade that very night to a place of temporary concealment, from whence he could write, he thought, to Mary, and explain his strange absence. Alas ! the spot to which they proceeded was on the coast, and as Tom, on the evening of the next day, was returning from seeing his friend embark, he was met by a press-gang, captured, and sent to sea. He had deferred writing to his wife till the fugitive was gone—now it was too late ! He was carried on board a ship which sailed the next day, and had no opportunity, for many weeks, of forwarding any intelligence of his fate to his family.

When, at last, he despatched a letter, by

“an opportunity,” to England, (for the post organised as it now is, did not then exist) poor Mary was in the churchyard. The bearer of it, by a singular chance, went to Charliewood, learnt the sad tidings of Mary’s death, and the subsequent adoption of her infant, and thinking his friend Tom must have had some very sufficient reasons for so mysteriously disappearing, said nothing about his existence and present position, kept the letter, and some two years afterwards, meeting its writer on a foreign station, returned the worn and crumpled missive to him, and told him of his wife’s death.

Tom grieved deeply for his Mary; but his light, thoughtless nature could not long retain sorrow; by the time he returned to England, his old joyousness of spirit was restored. He fell in love, while in port, with the pretty sister of a messmate, and married her—and this new tie—the awkwardness of explaining his disappearance from Charliewood—the cer-

tainty he felt that his statement would not be believed, and his opinion that his little girl was better cared for by her aunt and uncle than she could be elsewhere, induced him to continue, when discharged from his ship, a voluntary exile from his native place. He had made a little prize-money during the first year or two of his impressment; but the war was now ended, and he could hope, in future, for nothing beyond his wages. He had, however, grown fond of his enforced calling, which accorded well in its variety and its excitement, and in the joyous habits of its followers, with his own jovial, energetic, erratic temper, and he entered himself voluntarily on the books of a gallant frigate, and went to sea again, after a few months rest on shore.

His second wife died some two years after their marriage, leaving him once more the father of an orphan girl, an infant of a year old. This little one was entrusted, during his cruises, to the care of an old nurse, who, on

his return from his last voyage, (one of five years' duration) informed him that the poor child had died of measles, whilst on a visit to her (the nurse's) relations in Yorkshire. This intelligence fell heavily on Tom Dabney, or as he had been entered in the ship's books, Tom Taylor. He had received a warrant for his good conduct—had plenty of money in his pocket, and was beginning to long for a home on shore. He found himself suddenly all alone in the world. The death of her little sister naturally turned his thoughts towards our poor Audrey, and still unwilling to show himself in Charliewood, he employed the services of his favourite, and in some sort *protégé*, Jack Lockerman, in finding out how matters stood at the sexton's house. We have seen the result.

“ I tell you what, Jack,” said Dabney, after a pause, “ before we set out, I'll make sure they are not still in England. We'll put an

advertisement in the papers. But first, are you sure your information is correct?"

"Could n't be better," said Jack. "Had it from Missis Dabney herself."

"Ah! poor Kate! if she told you the story, it must be true, for she was truth itself. How did you get to see her?"

"Why, d'ye see, I thought it best not to have any mistakes, so I made up my mind for to go to the sexton's myself, and make belief to ax after you. So I went, and a woman came to the door. Say I, Mem, are you Missis Dabney? says she 'I is;' says I, axing your parding, can you tell me what's become of one Tom Dabney as used to bring-to in these ports? says she, 'poor soul! he's dead and gone this twenty year—'"

"Well, well," interrupted Tom, a little impatiently, "that will do. Did she tell you that my daughter had married a wandering organ-grinder?"

“ She did — she says, says she, ‘ his daughter a’ most broke my husband’s heart, by going and marrying a foreigner.’ What sort of a one? says I. ‘ Why,’ says she, ‘ a fellow who is all but a beggar, and goes about the country singing.’ One of the barrel organ, mice and monkey folks, says I. ‘ Yes,’ says she.”

“ Ah ! then there is no hope that it may be false,” sighed Tom.

“ Devil a bit.”

“ For Kitty always spoke the truth—a rare one she was every way ; I never looked upon a bonnier lass. Is she still good-looking, Jack ?”

“ Well,” said Jack, with some hesitation, “ I thought hers a queer-looking figure-head, rather, and I can’t say she’d ever have been *my* fancy gal ; but there’s no accounting for taste.”

“ Years must have sadly changed her, then ;

but, come, let us set about the advertisement."

And Tom, who was a tolerable penman, produced, in a few minutes, the following advertisement, guided in all its details by the long accounts with which Jack continued to furnish him on the authority of Mrs. Dabney—

"Notice.—Any person or persons, who can and will give information to Mrs. Harrison of the Keppel's Head Inn, Common Hard, Portsea, respecting a foreigner called Hur Fiddlekin, shall be handsomely rewarded. The said Fiddlekin carries a barrel organ, and exhibits mice and monkeys about the streets; should this advertisement meet his eye, he is requested to call on Mrs. Harrison, when he will hear of something greatly to his advantage."

"Brayvo, Tom," exclaimed Jack, rubbing

his hands in great glee, "that's as good an invertisement as I ever see. That'll find him! Shall we wait for an answer to that signal, or sail at once?"

"We'll wait a week, Jack, and then if nothing comes of it, we will start together."

No notice was, however, taken of the advertisement, though daily inserted in the papers; and, at the end of a week, Tom Dabney and his young companion set out on their search after Audrey and her husband.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE are few such homes, even in this land of domestic peace and comfort, as that in which Audrey found herself placed by her husband, shortly after their arrival at York. It was a large old house, which had once been attached to a farm and a manor, but which now only retained as much land as sufficed for a garden at the back, and a small plot of grass, shaded by two old elms in front of it; a long, low, rambling dwelling, but so picturesquely

situated, and having about it so much that reminded Basil of his own mountain home, that it caught his fancy in preference to more modern houses in its neighbourhood. It was furnished in a style befitting its antiquity and appearance ; and though the furniture was, of course, somewhat worn, as well as old-fashioned, Audrey thought it magnificent in comparison with the humble goods and chattels of her uncle's cottage. She rambled over it, with her husband, enjoying, with an innocent pride, the idea of being absolute mistress of such a fine house, and uttering, continually, exclamations of delight and gratification. Then she had to select bed-rooms for her two poor friends, and the choice was made carefully, and with a pretty anxiety for their comfort, which charmed Basil. One servant sufficed for such a notable little wife, and her room was fixed next to the dame's, as an additional precaution for her being cared for.

To the old furniture, Basil added only one

article ; but that one was such an unequalled, undreamed-of luxury for Audrey. It was a fine-toned piano, on which, when at home, he practised daily, to the infinite delight of John Page, who thus, for the first time, heard music of the best kind. We say when at home, for, in order that he might provide for his new charges, the musician was compelled to travel from town to town over the northern districts, singing at each, and generally with good success ; but, as Audrey accompanied him, the tour was rather a pleasant excursion than a toil. She so enjoyed this glimpse of the world—was so proud and delighted at the applause he won—that Basil forgot his occasional fatigue and exhaustion in his sympathy with her half-childish pleasure. She possessed in a vivid degree, the power of enjoying the simplest amusement, and of discovering sources and motives for happiness, in ordinary objects and events.

Thus, though rejoicing in the variety and

novelty of her journeying, she was equally satisfied when they returned to their country home, at which Basil intended to remain a short time prior to his return to the Tyrol, whither he was going in order to bring his mother with him to England.

John Page hailed their return with great joy, and even Dame Page appeared sensible of having missed Audrey, for she followed her about the house incessantly during the first few days, and was uneasy when out of her sight. As we have said, never was there a happier home. The purest and truest affection united its inmates, and no jarring temper or selfish disposition threatened to snap its delicate thread, or mar its unity, in any way ; the cares or sorrows of that little household must come from without, not, as is too frequently the case, from within. And oh, how much lighter the affliction that comes from God, than that which proceeds from our own evil tempers !

Their tastes, also, harmonised. John listened

with intense pleasure to Basil's singing, or to the beautiful voice which he now amused himself with educating ; and Basil, in his turn, delighted in hearing John talk, and in gathering information from the well-read cripple. Audrey listened to both, or delighted herself in planning and executing a thousand little kind schemes for their comfort and enjoyment ; at times, nevertheless, the thought of Basil's approaching departure would damp her innocent glee, and make her creep close to his side, when they gathered round the evening fire, and

“ Whilst wind and rain beat dark December.”

heard from his lips, of the yet fiercer blasts and mighty snow wreaths of the Tyrolean Alps.

Their tiny flower beds were gay with early blossoms, and the violet bank “ took the winds with beauty,” scattering all the sweets of May,

when Basil bade them farewell. It was a sad break up of their happiness, but he promised to return very, very soon ; and Audrey tried to bear bravely up against her sorrow, and not to let him see how much their parting grieved her. John was now, as he had ever been, her consoler ; he who had suffered much, though silently, knew so well how to soothe. But he was no longer the victim of a hopeless and jealous love ; he was too good for such a fate as that. Audrey, the wife of another, was to him only as a dear sister.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Findelkinds had some few acquaintances in the neighbourhood, for many had sought an intimacy with the singer, and Basil was of a social turn, and liked to assemble a group of merry faces round his fire-side. One of these new friends, the best music-mistress in the neighbouring city had formed a great liking for Audrey, and with the kind motive of cheering her comparative solitude after her husband's departure came almost daily to sit and chat with them in

the evening. It was but a week after Basil had left them, that this personage joined their fireside trio, with a face of unusual gravity and sadness. They were startled by the change of expression, for her countenance was generally a very mirror of mirthful content, and Audrey, as she took her hand, asked her anxiously if anything was the matter.

She was answered by a burst of tears.

“Oh, my dear friend,” sobbed Mrs. Cowley, “I am ruined. The savings of my whole life are gone; nothing is before my poor children but poverty and toil.”

“How can that be? what has happened?” asked Audrey, much astonished.

“The —— Bank,” naming a large country bank, “has failed, “and in it I had lodged the savings of my life, which has been one of constant toil. I heard of it yesterday morning; and you may imagine with what a heavy heart I went to give my daily routine of lessons. This morning I have had the same irksome

task of devoting my attention to others, whilst full of anxious thoughts ; and I am now come to seek a little comfort from your sympathy. I could not bear my solitary home."

"And indeed I am very, very sorry," said Audrey, tenderly leading her to a seat, "but is there no hope of saving your money? I don't quite understand what a bank breaking means."

Mrs. Cowley, explained ; and Audrey turned to John saying—

"It is a sad thing, is it not, Johnnie?"

He looked very grave and distressed as he replied—

"Very sad, Audrey, for *you* I fear as well as for Mrs. Cowley. Have you forgotten? It is the bank on which you were to draw for money, till Basil's return ; I hope all *his* money was not placed in it."

"Is it? I did not remember the name at the minute, I was so sorry fer poor Mrs. Cowley. But, Johnnie," turning very pale, "if so, Basil

has lost *his* all, also, for he told me that all his money was in the same bank. Poor dear Basil, what will he do?—Thinking too that he is going to bring his mother to such a comfortable home.”

And Audrey’s eyes filled with tears.

“Dear Mrs. Findelkind,” said her visitor, “will not this misfortune greatly distress and perplex you?”

“Yes, it will! We have a little money in the house, but it will be perplexing if Basil stays away long.”

And with a troubled look she turned her eyes on Dame Page and Johnnie. What would become of them when the few pounds she had were spent? But John looked so distressed, that guessing in an instant he was regretting the charge he and his grandmother would be to her, she summoned all her courage, and said, with an attempt at cheerfulness—

“We can never want whilst Basil’s voice is spared us. He will come back with

the singing birds, and soon recover his loss. I think we can manage very well meanwhile."

And turning the conversation entirely on Mrs. Cowley's loss, she appeared to forget (and endeavoured to make John forget) her own misfortune, in interest for the affairs and pity for the troubles of the widowed mother. Mrs. Cowley left them greatly comforted, and encouraged to look forward more hopefully by the cheerful fortitude with which Audrey bore the like adversity. And, indeed, save for her husband's sake, our Audrey would have cared little for the loss; she had a child-like ignorance of the value of money, and an unbounded faith in Basil's power of protecting and providing for her. John, however, took a different and more worldly view of the matter. He had submitted with a meek humility to the Divine will which had rendered him helpless and dependent on others, and with a generous faith in his friends' love, had accepted the home and comforts they bestowed on him; but now,

that sudden poverty would make it difficult for them to live themselves, his position became a source of misery to him. It was by a strong effort of the will, and by many an earnest prayer that he subdued the rebellious murmur that rose in his heart, that night, and spoke with calm resolution to Audrey the next morning.

“Dear Audrey,” he said, “this trouble was most unforeseen, and threatens to be a heavy one, or at least to put you to much present discomfort and inconvenience. You will write of course at once to Basil, poor fellow !”

She drew her chair beside John’s couch, and replied with a quiet smile—

“No ; I shall not ; of what use would it be to make him uncomfortable and anxious about me. He shall not know it till his return.”

“But what will you do then ? How can you rent this house under your present circumstances ? Listen, dear,” he did not wait for a reply. “I have been thinking that I and poor

granny must no longer tax your kindness. We must apply to be returned to our parish, or," his voice faltered a little, "to be received, if they will allow it, into the Union here: and you had better take a small lodging. Then the money you have, will keep you, and leave a little for Basil on his return; it would be sad for him to arrive with his mother, and find you and himself penniless. You must let me manage for you now, Audrey."

"If that is your plan of managing, decidedly I *won't*. Why, John, I did not think you would be so soon discouraged, Now *my* plan is to keep the house all ready for Basil and our mother, and to live a little more carefully ourselves, that's all."

"But how is that possible?"

"I'll tell you; I planned it all last night before I slept. I shall ask Mrs. Cowley to try and get me work, you know I am very quick with my needle—dear dame said it was the only thing I could do—and I shall be *very* industrious, and get nearly enough to keep us

all. Then I have money in the house to pay a quarter's rent, and I shall, when Basil returns, write to my uncle, and ask him for the five pounds Miss Beaumont gave me, which he put into the Savings' bank—I hope *that* has not broke too!—I never intended to claim it; but for Basil's sake, I will. He will have that on his arrival; and then he will sing, and we shall be just as well off as we were before."

John sighed.

"How you must toil for us though, dear Audrey," he said, "I cannot let you do so; you must, indeed, give up the thought of keeping us."

"I will not, John! What! Would you deprive me of my friends? You would be more cruel than this tiresome bank, which has but deprived us of a little dross after all, and given me something to do. Ah! I was not intended for a fine lady."

Audrey kept her cheerful resolution. An

hour afterwards, she was in deep consultation with Mrs. Cowley, who readily promised her aid; and work was procured for the young wife with ease—at first, from compassion, and the feeling abroad of pity for those who had suffered by the bank; and after the excitement had worn off, from approval of the skill she manifested. Nevertheless, it was a hard struggle for Audrey to support three people by her needle, and do the work of the house also, for she had, of course, discharged her servant. She rose at early dawn; she never slept till midnight. Needlework was better paid in those days than now, and such a work-woman found constant employment; but still, she could only live by constant and earnest labour. Moreover, she tried to keep the garden in order as well as she could; and she had to tend on dame Page and John almost as on two children. The poor old woman could scarcely render Audrey any assistance; the only work she retained any memory for

was knitting ; and it was not always that even John's voice, and the force of an old habit, could induce her to use her knitting pins. Her dotage was fickle, indolent, and, at times, cross and wayward. But cheerfully and steadily the young woman toiled on, and John's love and gratitude were sometimes lost in admiration, as he lay and watched her—now flitting about with buoyant alacrity, setting the house in neat order—now bending, for hours, over her varied and beautiful fancy-work, improving on old patterns, or devising new—chatting to him the while about their former childish sports and studies, or talking, with her heart in her eyes, of the absent Basil—soothing his grandmother's waywardness, or humouring her childish fancies—and very often charming both, and refreshing her own tired attention by singing sweetly as she worked.

She had been, hitherto, cheered by letters from Basil, which, being despatched at every resting place on his route, reached her as

quickly and regularly as the then postal arrangements permitted.

At length came one dated from the Aalberg itself. Audrey uttered a cry of joy when she opened it.

“He is at home, Johnnie, at home at last—now he will soon return.”

But as she proceeded in her beloved task of perusal, the light faded from her countenance. The letter was not, as others had been, sad only because its writer was absent from her; Basil wrote now under the pain of disappointment and filial anxiety. He had found his mother very ill, too ill to move—indeed, their good pastor, who frequently acted the part of medical as well as spiritual adviser to his flock, declared he did not think she would live through the summer, and the son feared he had arrived only to see her die. Of course he could not leave her; he knew Audrey would not desire it, and he made no apology to her for the delay; he regretted it deeply,

but filial love for a dying mother was in the ascendant, and there was more of her, of his grief and anxiety for her sake, than of lover-like repining at the separation, which might be possibly lengthened into months.

He concluded by urging Audrey to procure, meanwhile, for herself and friends, everything that might tend to their comfort and pleasure.

Poor Audrey was sorely grieved—more, in truth, for Basil's sake than for her own. There was not one selfish feeling stirring in her heart—no mean jealousy of his mother—no thought of her own position, left thus unfriended and destitute—it was simply grief for *his* sorrow; and in her answer, she strove only to comfort him, and never hinted at the difficulties his prolonged absence must create for herself. But, after her letter was gone, and she had leisure, whilst she plied her needle, to meditate and reflect on the

future, a feeling of fear and doubt, for the first time, arose in her mind. How *could* she retain their present home for such a long, indefinite period? She feared it would be impossible. Hitherto, they had lived wholly by her work; but such labour, she felt, could not be continued for nearly a year without rest or respite, much less could she so increase it as to pay the high rent of her present dwelling. She consulted John, and he, at once, assured her that it was both impossible, and would pain Basil hereafter, when he should learn by what toil the house had been kept.

They determined, therefore, that she should see the landlord, explain her position, and beg him to take it off her hands at once.

The worthy farmer heard her little story with interest, and answered her with kindness. He would release her from being his tenant; but he offered her another and very cheap dwelling instead of her present one—

a rambling old house that nobody, he acknowledged, would hire, and which, if she did not think it too large, too solitary, and too dismal, should be hers at a mere nominal rent.

The latter assurance would have reconciled our poor Audrey to any tolerable habitation, and she thankfully accepted the good man's offer to show her the place. It was at no great distance from the city, nearer, in fact, than her present home, which, now she had to carry her work home, and go to the town on her own household errands, was an advantage ; but she was a little startled by its appearance. It stood at the end of a long, solitary lane, far from any human habitation, and was surrounded by old trees, which almost hid it from view.

When, however, they stood before it, Audrey found that it was surrounded by a dilapidated and time-worn verandah, and that it had once been a house of some pretensions.

As she walked over it with her landlord, she was struck and chilled by the solemn gloom which seemed to fill the rooms, and by the air of utter desertion and abandonment about it.

“Why,” she asked, timidly, “has this house so long been left uninhabited? It must once have been a pretty place.”

“Yes,” replied her conductor, “but more than twenty years ago, a murder was supposed to have been committed in it; foolish stories of its being haunted got about, and ever since it has remained on my hands. I have repaired it, at times, of course, but I shan’t do so any more, unless, after it has been once more occupied, it should let. I tell you the whole truth about it, and I offer it to you, in consequence, rent free for the first quarter, and afterwards for ten pounds a year.”

For a moment, Audrey hesitated; but the remembrance of her two helpless burdens—of their scanty means—of the possibility of Basil

requiring a remittance before his return—of all the threatening wants of the future—overcame her womanly terror at the loneliness of the spot, and her natural horror of the crime-stained dwelling, and she accepted the offer.

The farmer was pleased ; he commended her courage ; promised to lop the trees, and throw the front of the dwelling more open, and to make the place as comfortable as he could. The furniture had to be purchased, and few and simple as the mere necessities she procured were, they cost more than Audrey, in her ignorance, had calculated on. However, they were bought, and the deserted house assumed, under her direction, an air of neatness, if not of comfort. Basil's piano was conveyed to it. The farmer had been earnest with her to sell it ; but Audrey could not persuade herself to part with it ; since Basil might find it difficult to replace on his return.

Happily, when our poor friends took posses-

sion of their new abode, summer, in all its luxuriant glory, was around them, embellishing the dreariest spots of earth with grace and beauty ; banishing gloom with sunlight, and laying all fears of ill spirits by the calm and silver radiance of its nights. Moreover, Audrey had little time for the indulgence of imaginative terrors ; night found her wearied and ready to sleep, or if wakeful, full of thoughts of the dear, absent Basil. He wrote as often as possible, but gave no present hope of his return ; his mother could not live, but sank very slowly and gradually, and it was evident from many passages in his letters, that Basil, feeling at what a price his emancipation from the Alpine solitudes would be purchased, reproached himself for the longing he entertained to see his wife again. Perhaps he ought to have thought more of her who should have occupied the first place in his heart, but the sensitive and impressionable Tyrolese was ever most af-

fect by any present object of pity or tenderness; he doted on his mother; he felt, in a measure, guilty of her death, for they told him that the poor woman had pined from the hour he left her; and he was, moreover, altogether ignorant of Audrey's real situation. Therefore, he had good excuse for that long lingering in his native land, during which summer waned, and a stormy autumn drew towards its close.

Long months of toil—of hope delayed—of anxiety and care had they been to her who worked, and—now, alas! wept in England; for her health was failing, and though she strove still to bear up bravely, for Basil's sake, and never let her poor friends miss her cheerful smile and encouraging tone, she felt a feebleness creeping over her; a heart-sickness, and a nervous desponding that peopled the night with phantoms and evil dreams, or stole the refreshment of sleep altogether from her eyes.

At such moments, her struggle with the world assumed an aspect absolutely terrible to her fancy ; and she wept for those careless days of happy childhood and thoughtless youth, which were gone for ever.

CHAPTER IX.

It was a dreary Hallowe'en; the wind howled over the snow-drift on which the moon, striving with thick and hurried clouds, shone fitfully, and, with a sickly glare. Audrey lay sleepless, watching the feeble rays stealing between her window curtains, and throwing into the chamber a dim, ghastly light, by the illusive power of which the few simple articles of furniture, that the room contained, assumed spectral and grotesque forms.

She had been all day bending over a weary task ; her tired eyes refused to close, her excited brain to rest. She could not fix her wandering thoughts—not even on Basil—and all sorts of fantastic fears that haunt the wakeful hours of night tormented her. Now she heard sounds for which she could not account ; those mysterious noises that are audible only in darkness, and raising herself on her arm, she listened eagerly—the strained and excited sense catching the least sound—she half thought the repose of midnight was about to be rudely broken by robbers. Then a perfect silence followed, and she sank back on her pillow with a whispered prayer. Nevertheless the transient alarm had aroused the memory she always strove to banish of the murder which had desecrated her dwelling, and her busy fancy directly conjured up a vision of terror and horror, which she vainly tried to banish. Whilst she closed her eyes and strove against this self-tormenting, a sudden cry or

wail struck on her ear. Once more she started up to listen. This time not vainly. A low moaning—the accents of human suffering—mingled with the wail of the wind. Could the dame or John be ill? She sprang out of bed in a moment, lifted her candle, and opening her door, after a minute's nervous pause at it, hurried down the passage to their rooms which adjoined each other. All was silent there. A hasty glance sufficed to show her that they slept, and she was returning to her chamber, believing that fancy had tricked her ear, when the sound, plainer and more painful than ever, was again audible. It came from outside the house, and was evidently a tone of suffering; losing all fear Audrey threw up the passage window and looked out. The moon, at the same instant, peeped from her cloudy screen, and shone full upon the prostrate body of a woman lying near the porch. The moans came from her.

Greatly alarmed and distressed, Audrey looked in every direction for some ruffianly appearance that might explain the posture and groans of the poor creature, but no other being was to be seen ; it was therefore probable that the unfortunate woman had sunk beneath the severity of the night, the sharp cold wind of which blew cuttingly round Audrey herself, and compelled her hurriedly to close the window. She forgot everything, on the instant, save womanly pity. She was bold in the kindness of her tender heart ; and merely returning to her own room for a cloak to wrap herself in, she fearlessly descended the stairs, opened the door, and went to the prostrate figure.

She found it was a very young woman, who looked as if she were near death, so fixed and rigid were her features, and pallid her face. But she was not insensible, and she answered Audrey's pitying questions in broken accents.

“I am dying—starved—cold.”

“Try and raise yourself, then, and let me help you into the house. Come, take my hand; there, lean on me—you will soon be better.”

And with some difficulty she brought the wretched creature into the house, and into the parlour; then putting her on John's couch, and covering her first in a blanket, she administered a little brandy (kept for dame Page's occasional use,) kindled the fire, and strove to restore her by chafing her half-frozen hands. Whilst thus occupied, she was struck by the prettiness of the girl, who appeared scarcely more than fourteen or fifteen years of age, and was, though scantily, decently clothed. The face reminded Audrey of some person whom she had seen, though where she had met the likeness she could not recall. Her benevolent efforts succeeded so well, that in an hour the perishing creature was much restored, and she ventured

to give her food ; sparingly, however, and with caution, for she found that her charge was absolutely starving from hunger as well as cold. Very patiently, very gently did Audrey attend upon the beggar thus thrown on her charity ; never pausing in her holy task to ask a question of suspicion or idle curiosity. It was enough for her, that one suffering demanded her aid. If for an instant a selfish thought mingled with her benevolent cares, it was a prayer, that if ever Basil were thus exposed upon those snowy solitudes that frequently haunted her visions, he might find the like aid.

It was near morning, ere Audrey could persuade herself to leave her charge ; but then, as the girl had sunk into a slumber, she ventured to seek an hour or two's sleep herself.

The morrow found Audrey beside her guest's couch, just as the unfortunate girl awoke. She looked round her on opening her eyes with a

bewildered gaze ; then, perceiving Audrey, a recollection of how she had been preserved and sheltered rushed on her mind, and she exclaimed—

“ Oh, madam, how can I thank you ? you have saved my life.”

Audrey smiled.

“ Are you better this morning ?” she asked, kindly.

“ I think I am,” she replied.

Then endeavouring to raise herself on the couch, she sank back with a groan.

“ Oh ! how my limbs ache,” she cried. “ I feel that I cannot move.”

“ Lie still, for the present,” said her young hostess, gently ; “ you have caught cold, I dare say, from exposure to the night wind—you will be better by-and-bye—I will get you some tea, presently.”

“ How good you are ; ah ! I thought no one pitied me.”

A man who worked on the nearest farm had been engaged by Audrey to call morning and evening, in order to carry John Page to and from his bed room. As she had fully ascertained before his arrival, that the girl was utterly incapable of moving, she wrapt her in blankets, and as soon as he came, employed his services in carrying the sufferer to a small, vacant room near her own, in which she hastily made up a bed ; and when John Page, attended by his grand-mother, took his usual place on the couch, Audrey amazed him by relating the strange adventure of the night. John pitied and wondered, but thought Audrey could not have acted differently ; no doubts as the propriety or prudence of giving shelter to such a stranger crossed the simple minds of either of the young people ; and when Audrey, by a strange coincidence, read from the appointed Daily Lesson the injunction to show hospitality to strangers because some had thus

entertained "Angels unawares," a secret pleasure shone in the countenances of this true brother and sister, at the conviction of having been enabled to obey it.

The poor unknown continued very ill all day ; she was exhausted by fatigue and long fasting, and racked by rheumatic pains. Her hostess waited on her as tenderly as if they had been near and dear friends, and old Dame Page, excited by the presence of a stranger, awoke to a brighter gleam of intellect, and sat by her, and attended on her with something of her old intelligent and matronly manner. She chose to style the girl "Mary," and by a strange hallucination, appeared to connect her in her mind with John's dead mother, for she spoke to her, at times, of "little Johnnie," and said, she (Mary) would find him much grown. The invalid did not contradict or thwart her fancy, but followed her as she moved about the room with wondering eyes ; feeling, perhaps,

as if all she saw and heard was but the phantasmagoria of a dream.

On the second evening of her abode beneath their roof, she appeared much better; her strength was slowly returning, her pain less, and as Audrey, after bringing her some tea, was about to leave the room, she detained her, saying, she wanted to say a few words to her.

The kind little hostess instantly seated herself beside the bed, and prepared to listen, not without some natural curiosity, to the account her visitor could give of herself.

“You’ve been very kind to me, ma’am,” said the girl, in a strong provincial, though *not* Yorkshire dialect—“and you’ve never so much as asked who I be, or how I come a dying at your door. I dare say, you thinks I’m a tramp, but indeed I ain’t; I’ve seen better days, young as I be; it ain’t no fault of mine that I be so poor.”

“No, I suppose, not,” said Audrey, half smiling, “no one would be poor if they could help it.”

“But I means,” said the girl, with a flash of impatience in her dark eyes, “I’ve been very ill-used, or I shouldn’t have been half starved, and dying of cold in the street. I run away from my place, to be sure, but nobody would have staid in it, to be treated as I was—that they wouldn’t.”

“Were you in service?”

“Yes, ma’am—I was nursery-maid to some people miles away from here; down by the sea coast; and I led a life worse than a dog’s. I had hard work, hard fare, and hard words to put up with; and then missis, who spoils her children, wouldn’t let me take away Master Tommy’s whip, when he beat me across the face with it; but made me take that, and all the kicks and pinches he choose to give me besides; and I wouldn’t bear it, that I wouldn’t! and so I give her warning, but she wouldn’t

give me a character, she said, and nobody would take me without one, so I was forced to stay on. She was always a-scoldin' on me; and if a thing was lost, she always 'cused me of havin' taken it, and said I should be put in prison for it. Well, one day, there come a gipsy 'oman a-beggin' to the back door, and I let her tell my fortune; but while she was a-telling of it, I heard Miss Sally cry, and I was obliged to run at once and see what was the matter with her. When I came back, the woman was gone. I didn't think of any harm then coming of it; but soon after, the maid-of-all-work came in, and found that the basket with the silver spoons and forks in it was gone. So with that, she said it were all my fault, and that she know'd missis would say I had sold them, or given 'em to the gipsy, and that she must go to tell her at once. I was so frightened, I didn't know what to do. Master was a terrible man when he was in a passion, worse than missis; and I knew how angry

they'd both be ; I dared not stay to bear it ; and while Betsy went up-stairs, I opened the back door, and ran away across the fields, and hid myself in a coppice nigh at hand."

"You did wrong," said Audrey ; "they might from your flight think you guilty of abetting the woman's robbery. You should have remained and told the truth."

"Master would have beat me, ma'am ! oh ! indeed he would, and I was *so* afraid. He's such a bad, revengeful man—he'd never have forgot it. So, as I said, I ran away. I know they searched for me ; once or twice they passed close to where I was hid in the coppice ; and I heard master swear he'd have me hanged," she shuddered ; "but they didn't find me, I crouched down behind the holly bushes, and at night, when they were gone, I stole away, and ran down all sorts of by-lanes, and across lonely fields, and wandered on for three or four days, never daring to go near a house to beg a bit of bread ; till, at last, I

found myself before your door, and there I lay down to die, for I couldn't walk no further."

"Poor thing!" said Audrey, "you had better not have run away; but it is of no use to blame you for it now; you must have suffered sadly from your mistake. Have you no father and mother to go to?"

"No, ma'am; mother died when I was a baby, and father was drowned at sea. There ain't nobody as cares for me. Nobody was ever kind to me but you."

And the dark, and rather fierce eyes of the young wanderer were, for a moment, dimmed by tears.

"Be easy, for the present," said Audrey, kindly, "you shall stay here till you are well and strong; then we will see what can be done for you."

She rose, and as she left the room, and descended to the parlour, a little perplexity clouded her brow, as to what *could* be done for her unlucky guest; but she drove away

the recollection of her own inability to meet this new expense, and the disagreeable impression the girl's narrative had made on her mind, by the exertion of that divine charity which "thinketh no evil," and resolved, at least, while she was so painfully suffering, to consider only the poor creature's present necessities.

CHAPTER X.

TOM DABNEY and his friend were, meantime, pursuing their search after Audrey and her husband through France.

On reaching Dover, they made enquiries everywhere as to whether such a personage as the supposed " Fiddlekin " had been seen, and although a mere organ bearer was not of importance enough to have attracted much attention, it chanced that a certain waiter, at the public house where they had taken up

their abode for the time, remembered such an organist, (with the identical paraphernalia of monkey and mice who, moreover, had an English wife, with him) embarking for Calais precisely a week before.

Tom was, of course, certain that he was on the right track now, and followed it without hesitation. At Calais they repeated their enquiries, and thanks to the number of such itinerant minstrels moving about the world, and their own imperfectly understood queries, they again received information, which led them to believe that the objects of their search were not far distant.

They pursued them up to the gates of Paris, for everywhere tidings of this mirage-like pair were to be obtained, and nowhere were they to be overtaken.

Here, however, the chase appeared more arduous and difficult; and Jack swore not a few oaths at the "paltry fellow," for thus getting out of their way; but as they found

much in the great city to amuse them, and delighted in wandering, they were in no mood to give up their absurd project. Tom consoled himself by saying, that if they did not catch the pair on the road, they should find them safe at anchor, at last, in the Tyrol ; for, as we have seen, Dabney possessed more knowledge, geographical and otherwise, than falls to the lot of most men of his station, and had, moreover, taken great pains, before he left England, to ascertain “the bearing,” as he called it, of the Tyrol Alps. Still, it would have been vexatious to pass his daughter on the road ; and, consequently, he searched Paris carefully for an organ-grinder with an English wife, interrogating all he could find by means of a “*garçon*” of the hotel, and assembling groups of grinders round the house, and under his windows, by the largesses he showered upon them. In fact, he and Jack seldom moved about the *quartier* they inhabited without a musical attendant of this description following them,

for, the droll fancy of "*cet Anglais*" having been whispered abroad amongst the organ-grinders, they were willing to take advantage of it.

One day Jack returned with a countenance radiant with hopes; he had found them at last. He had met a fellow with a monkey and white mice, and with a handsome face, just such as a girl would take a fancy to. He had asked him if he spoke English, and had been answered affirmatively. He had then questioned the musician as to his matrimonial condition, had found that he had a wife, and that she was English.

Here Tom interrupted him.

"Did you ask him from what part of England?" he said, eagerly.

"Oh! certainly. I said, Does she come from Charliewood? 'Yes,' says he, 'that's the name.' And, says I, was her name Dabney, and did she lose her father and mother when she was a baby? 'Yes,' says he. Her

father disappeared, says I, didn't he? and folks said as he was killed? 'Yes,' says he, 'they did.' And so I went on asking him all about it, and it proves to be your very daughter and son-in-law. I wanted him to come back with me to you; but he said he would go first and fetch his wife, for she would be quite delighted--so, to-day, you may order dinner for *four*. Tom, depend upon it, they'll soon be here, and hungry enough too, for your new son is as ragged as well may be."

Tom Dabney's feelings were divided between pleasure at seeing his daughter, and disgust at the degrading choice she had made; and with something like shame, he thought of his ragged son's approaching visit. But the dinner-hour passed, and brought no organ-man and no daughter, and Tom was beginning to fancy that some rogue had been hoaxing Jack, when a tattered boy, bearing a crumpled letter in his hand, was ushered in; the waiter announcing, with a suppressed smile, that "he came with

a message for Monsieur from Madame *sa fille*."

With a bow, and a few words, of which Tom did not ask the meaning, the lad delivered the missive, which Dabney eagerly opened.

"Confound it," he said, after reading it, "if the girl hasn't half forgot her English. I never read such a concern—but she's ill, poor thing, she says, and has no clothes; she's ashamed to come to me, and begs I'll come to her, and bring a little money to pay their rent, and get her decent clothing—poor soul! I swear, if she was not so poor, I could be angry."

And our good-natured sailor brushed away a tear.

"You'll go, I suppose?" said Jack.

"Of course."

"Well, come away then."

"But, Jack, you see," said Dabney, hesitating, "it may not be pleasant for the poor wench to be seen by a stranger in such

poverty. I think, if you please, I'll go alone."

"I'm not going for to allow you to do any such thing," replied Jack, resolutely, "you don't know where you're going, nor at what hour you'll be back again, and in this cut-throat place of a *Parée*, as they call it, it's always well to sail in company. But I don't want to intrude on you neither; I will but walk about outside the house, and keep within hail, that I may come back with you again. Your daughter hasn't married into a very honest or respectable family, I'm afraid, from what I saw of the chap; and of his present bearings, which ain't much better than the back of the Point, Tom."

Tom could not refuse his friend permission to accompany him, thus urged; and after the poor father had replenished his purse, and burdened their guide—the boy messenger—with a basket of food and wine, the pair set out on their expedition.

Their course soon led them far from the respectable *quartier* in which they dwelt, and branched off into so many ill-favoured and ominous-looking little streets, that Dabney was, by no means, sorry he had assented to his friend's accompanying him

The boy paused, at length, before a tall, narrow, dirty-looking dwelling, and told them that it was here their walk terminated.

Tom understood the child's gestures rather than his words, and rang at once for admittance.

The door was opened by an aged porteress, and Jack saw his friend disappear in the depths of a long dark passage, down which her skinny hand pointed him ; he then commenced a slow patrol up and down outside the dwelling, till Tom should return.

It was a dull evening ; a small drizzling rain was falling fast ; the street was, as we have said, extremely narrow, and the gigantic old houses, towering on each side, made it darker

even than the hour of the day warranted. Jack whistled as he walked, and strove to be merry ; but a strange fear, or rather presentiment of some threatening peril hung on his mind ; his step, by degrees, became less buoyant, and the whistle ceased. He cast a somewhat rueful glance at the narrow slip of sky overhead, and tried to think his discomfort proceeded from the weather. Was there no way of escaping from the thick small drops that so teasingly blew in his face at every alternate turn he took ? He looked round, and perceived that a narrow covered way ran between the house Tom had entered, and its neighbour, and he took refuge in this passage for a few minutes. There was a side-door opening into it from each of the dwellings it separated ; and as Jack was slowly perambulating it, chewing his quid, an old woman opened the one on his left hand, and peeped out at him. She was a haggard, evil-looking creature, her form bent by age, and her face soured and wrinkled by

time and temper, but Jack made her an exceedingly polite bow, and with the most insinuating smile he could assume, wished her—" *Bon jour* ;" he had, of course, picked up a few words of French during their stay in the country.

The old woman responded with more civility than one would have expected from her appearance, but was about to close the door in his face, as not desiring further acquaintance, when Jack, nimbly advancing, kept it open with his foot, and pointing out at the rain, and to the drops on his coat, solicited permission from madame to sit within the house till the shower was over.

The porteress, divining his meaning, shook her head ; but Jack was not to be so easily repulsed ; he addressed her again in accents of entreaty, which he backed by taking a franc from his pocket ; the sight of money—that universal language, and most moving tongue—had its expected effect ; the old woman grinned

a surly welcome, opened the door, and pointed to a seat in the narrow side passage, telling him, by words and more intelligible gestures, that thus far and no farther might he venture within her precincts.

Jack gave the coin, and nodded acquiescence, and the porterness then retreated into a sort of pantry, through the open door of which she kept strict, sharp watch over her guest. It was a dull place to sit in ; but Jack's desire to be within the house was thus gratified, and he felt easier.

Some ten minutes had passed thus heavily away, when carriage wheels were heard in the street, and the porterness was summoned to the front entrance.

She returned in a few minutes, followed by a tall and very handsome young lady, who was speaking rapidly, and in a quick, anxious tone, to a gentleman, who supported her on his arm. Jack thought he had seldom seen so beautiful a face, as she turned towards her companion,

though it was pale with some strong emotion. They passed rapidly by, and the old woman shortly returned to her post.

“Well,” thought our sailor, “at least, no one can come in or go out without my seeing them. I shan’t miss Tom, and he can’t be offended because I just took shelter in the house from the rain. That was as pretty a gal as I ever see, and quite a grand lady to look at. I wonder what she wants in such a place as this.”

The question was destined to receive a speedy solution; it had scarcely passed through his busy brain, ere a loud piercing shriek—ay, a cry in English for “Help,” woke the dull echoes of the old house, and startled him from his reverie. Quick as lightning, Jack sprang from his seat, and darted off, thrusting the old woman, who would have hindered him, from his path, with very little consideration for her sex, and rushing up the staircase, found him-

self face to face with the beautiful lady who had so recently entered, and who, at the instant, was forcibly dragged back into the room she had escaped from, by her attendant cavalier.

Shouting, "Avast, hands off, you rascal !" the seaman pursued them, burst open the door, before the gentleman could quite close it, with a kick, escaped a pistol shot which whizzed past him, and with one blow of his powerful fist levelled the youth who had discharged it at him with the ground.

The young lady, with a joyful cry, rushed towards him, and, at the same minute, a little, pale, weazen-faced man, with a pen in his hand, who was standing beside a table, covered with papers, darted past him with all the speed of fear, and ran out of the room. The whole affair was the work of a minute. Jack snatched a second pistol from the table, and seeing the need of dispatch, took the lady's

hand, and was leading her from the room, when the fallen man, recovering the stunning effect of the blow, made an effort to rise, pouring out a volley of French oaths.

“Oh, hasten, hasten,” cried the lady, dragging Jack forward, “let us escape whilst we may.”

“Don’t be frightened, ma’am,” said the sailor, giving a kick to the Frenchman, which again felled him ; “I’ve the rascal’s pistol, and will shoot him dead if he moves.”

And as he led his fair charge out of the room, he turned, closed the door, and locked it on the baffled villain, who had scarcely regained his feet.

Voices were heard now, on the stairs, and Jack, glancing down, perceived that their retreat was not to be peaceably achieved. The notary, who had fled, stood below, on the first landing, with two ominously ill-looking ruffians in *blouses*.

“Get out of our way, you sirs ! or I’ll

shoot you," cried Jack, taking aim at them from above.

"*Coquin !*" was the reply of the notary ;
"*quittez cette demoiselle ou vous mourrez !*"

"I'm blest if I know what you mean, old chap, with your *cockhen*, but I suppose it's some of your impudence ; stand out of the way, I say."

The men exchanged a few words, and then one of the *blouses*, drawing a long sharp knife from his girdle, made a step towards the stairs.

"The first man who moves dies !" cries Jack, levelling his pistol.

The young lady, at the same moment, uttered a succession of loud, piercing shrieks, for the imprisoned leader of the gang had forced the door, and her deliverer was between two foes.

As she saw he was advancing on Jack, she threw herself between them, reiterating her cry for help, and this time not in vain, for a

hurried step pressed the stairs that led to the upper regions of the densely peopled house, and Tom Dabney, armed with a formidable stick, and accompanied by a handsome though roguish-looking young man made his appearance, and perceiving Jack, pistol in hand, and the Frenchman holding the lady forcibly by the arm, rushed at once into the combat, knocked down the cavalier, and shouting to his comrade—

“Fire at the rascals, Jack,” prepared to force an exit.

Jack obeyed orders; and having a sudden and irresistible dislike to the lawyer, bent down, took aim at *him*, and hit him purposely in the leg. He fell, uttering a cry of fear and pain, and then hurriedly desired his companions to carry him away, and let “*ces Anglais*” go.

The fellows, who were intimidated by the sudden appearance of two more champions,

and by the resolution of Jack, obeyed willingly enough, being much better fitted to be agents in some massacre, unattended with danger, than to oppose a foe courageously.

Jack then supported the lady—who was more overpowered by the necessary violence on the notary, than she had been by her own peril—down the stairs, and out of the evil dwelling, attended on and protected by Tom and the organ-bearer.

She shuddered extremely as they passed the spot stained with blood, and nearly fainted as they issued from the house. Tom sent the organ bearer in all haste for a coach, and assisted his comrade meantime in supporting the tottering steps of the poor girl they had rescued.

When the *fiacre* appeared, she was lifted into it, and her deliverers asked—

“Where she wished to go?”

“To the Hotel ——,” she replied, “but I must entreat you, my brave countrymen, to

accompany me ; I shall be afraid to drive thither alone, and besides I wish my father to thank and reward you as you deserve."

" Oh, never talk of reward, madam," said Jack, " I shouldn't have been worthy of the name of a Englishman if I hadn't come to help you. I've done but my duty—but if you are at all afraid, why Tom and I will convey you with pleasure."

And the seamen accordingly took their seats in the carriage.

" It was very fortunate, as it chanced, that in my terror, I called for "help," in English," said the lady, " though I had no notion a countryman was within hearing of my cries."

" Well, I should have understood you wanted it anyhow by your screeching, Miss," said Jack, " but of course I was twice as glad to hear English, tho' a gal in distress has as much claim on one whether she be French or English."

“I thank you in the name of my sex, for that manly sentiment,” said the lady, smiling.

“But if I may be so bold as to ax, ma’am,” said the sailor, “how came such a lady as you, in that ’ere den of thieves.”

“I was lured thither by a falsehood ;” was the reply, “the villain who brought me there, came to our hotel, during my father’s absence from it, told me Sir Philip had been thrown from his horse, whilst riding near the Boulevards, and had been carried into the nearest house ; and that he came at my father’s request to take me to him. Of course I was so frightened, and in such grief, that I accompanied him instantly ; never dreaming of treachery, for the man is noble by birth, and we are acquainted with him. Being ignorant whither we were driving, I had no suspicion till I stood in the room where you found me, and beheld, not my father, but a lawyer, and a table strewed with parchments. The truth

flashed on me at once ; and at the instant that Monsieur le Vicomte threw himself at my feet, and began to explain his design, I darted out of the room and called for help. You know the rest.”

“He intended, I suppose, to compel you to sign a marriage contract, madam ?” said Tom, respectfully.

“Yes. Unfortunately I am rich, and my wealth tempted him to the commission of the deed.”

The sailors expressed their horror and indignation at the rascal loudly, and the lady repeated her thanks for her deliverance again and again.

On reaching the hotel, she asked eagerly if her father were returned, and being answered in the affirmative, entreated, nay compelled her deliverers to follow her to the saloon.

The surprise of the gentleman when he beheld his daughter enter—pale—her dress torn and disordered (for in her struggle with the

Vicomte, when Jack first saw her, it had been much discomposed), and followed by two strange seamen—was extreme, and it was increased, when advancing rapidly to him, she caught his hand, and burst into tears.

“My Helen!” he said, wonderingly, “what is the matter?”

“Thank God you are safe,” she sobbed, “I have been in great fear for you, and in great peril too from which these good brave men delivered me.”

And Helen Beaumont related to her father the strange incidents which had occurred since they parted in the morning. His rage and indignation may be imagined, but the expression of both was blended with warm and manly thanks to Jack and his friend. He would have rewarded them nobly, but they steadily refused to receive any recompense for having, as they said, “only done their duty,” Jack, however, after twirling his hat bashfully for a minute, said,

“That if his honor liked, they would be happy to drink miss’s health in a glass of grog.”

Sir Philip graciously and smilingly assented, and pledged them both and his fair, rescued daughter with a frankness that charmed them.

“Remember,” he said, as they prepared to depart, that if ever you need his assistance in any way, Sir Philip Beaumont will be thankful to repay in a small degree the great benefit you have conferred on him.”

“Is there nothing I can do for you to show my gratitude?” exclaimed Helen. “No? Well at least,” turning to Jack, “oblige me by accepting this watch,” presenting him with her own splendid one, “it really will be adding to the favour you have done me.”

“Thank ye, miss,” said Jack, hesitating, “you’re very kind, and it’s a great honor for the like of me; but, indeed, it would’nt become me to take or to use such a pretty thing as that, which is only fit, to my thinking, for

such a lady as you, or may be for the First Lord."

Helen was by no means clear as to whom "the First Lord," as Jack styled the Head of the Board of Admiralty, might be ; but she asserted that no lord or lady either could have a better right to wear the bauble than her brave champion, and Jack was finally persuaded to receive the beautiful watch and chain.

"I wish, added Sir Philip, "that you would have permitted me also to present you with a mark of my gratitude."

"Indeed, your honor," said Jack, his blithe face lighting up with innate chivalry, "it was reward enough to have saved such a lady from a rascally privateer of a Frenchman, even if she hadn't given me this 'ere pretty thing. And I'm flush of money too just now, sir, and and don't want a single thing ; but if your honour can't be easy without doing one good turn for another, why, if so be you ever see a poor messmate of mine in trouble, and will help

him, I shall take it as kindly as if 'twere done to myself."

"You are a very fine fellow," exclaimed the baronet, "and you may rely on my serving any brave seaman I may see in trouble for your sake. And you, my good friend?" he added, turning to Tom."

But Dabney, at once, in a very superior phrase to poor Jack's, declined any reward, and the two shortly afterwards departed, overwhelmed with thanks from the father and daughter.

"Helen," said Sir Philip, with an arch smile, when they were again alone, "you are *always* getting into danger and finding wonderful champions. Your seaman is even a finer fellow to *my* taste than your Tyrolese."

She blushed very deeply, stole to her father's side, put her arms round his neck and whispered—

"But your Helen won't fall in love with him."

Sir Philip kissed her, and both laughed as at some idle childish folly ; remembered now only as an absurdity.

Helen was in truth cured of her love-fit, tho' never before had she hinted at it. Her father fully comprehended, however, by those few words, that she was fancy free indeed, and secretly rejoiced that Findelkind had rejected the heiress. Sir Philip's fine countenance resumed from that day its old serenity and happy expression ; a formal recantation had not been half so convincing and satisfactory.

CHAPTER XI.

AUDREY'S guest grew rapidly better under her kind and fostering care, and the time came when the young hostess thought she might fairly let her try to get her own living. But when she candidly and gently told her that it was not in her power to keep her longer, for that it was only by great labour she could provide bread for her own household, the girl, who was of a very quick, impetuous nature, burst into a passion of sorrowful regret.

“Where am I to go,” she cried, “what will become of me? Without a character who will employ me? Who would trust me but you? Oh, let me stay! I will toil for you night and day; I will do your household work, I will tend the old lady and the poor crippled lad; I will help you at your needlework. You shall not lose a penny by keeping me with you.”

“But,” said Audrey, “I will venture to give you a character; I do believe I might, and that you would not disgrace my recommendation; and then you will earn wages for yourself, and get a comfortable home. We live but poorly and closely. You would do much better to get a service in which you would be paid, than to take one where you must help work with your needle to get only daily bread.”

“But where should I find one like you,” cried Mary, “I do believe you are almost an angel from Heaven. All the other women I have ever seen were noisy, scolding, crue^l

people, always ready to believe one a thief or anything bad. But you—you came out of your warm bed to save me from that terrible cold; you fed me with half your own loaf; you believed me when I told you what all others would say proved me a thief. No, I *won't* leave you."

And the girl's passionate importunity and strong will prevailed. Audrey permitted her to remain; "at least," she said, "for a time, on trial," and thus a new inmate was added to the old house's occupants. Nor had our heroine cause to regret her humanity. Her *protégée* toiled with a zeal and perseverance which had at times a kind of fierceness in them, and did double as much work under Audrey's direction and guidance as she could herself alone.

John Page watched the stranger with keen interest, and found great amusement in studying her character.

"She is a strange compound of good and

evil," he would say to Audrey when they sat alone, "her temper seems at times as fierce as that of a young tigress, and she moves about and even stitches with a rude energy that is quite startling. She would not be a very forgiving enemy, I am certain, though she is a red-hot friend. I think it is only her love for you that gives her the power of restraining her temper when poor granny is troublesome."

Q. "Nevertheless she has proved quite a blessing to me;" said Audrey, "do you know, Johnnie, that this week her work has produced twice as much as mine, and she won't take a single penny for her own use. Ill as I have felt at times lately, I could not have cleaned the house and worked too; I ought to be thankful for having found her."

"Well I will try and like her better," said the young man, "but she is a very unreasonable piece of excellence. She is as tart and keen, and sharp in her words as the veriest

shrew one ever heard of, and, dear Audrey, fearfully ignorant even for *her* station."

"Yes, indeed ; she can't read Johnnie," said Audrey, sorrowfully, "I wish I had time to teach her."

"I offered to do so myself," he replied, "but she gave me a thankless answer. "She didn't want to learn, not she ; didn't I see how busy she *ware* ?" mimicking her accent, "would her reading help her dear mistress ?"

Indeed, Mary not only disliked the idea of learning to read, but had no great fancy for John. She was very ignorant and very thoughtless, and had an antipathy to deformed people, which she did not attempt to conceal. The old dame also teased and irritated her. She spoke to both rudely, and with a raised voice, unless Audrey's eye rebuked her, and was as little with them as she could be. For her mistress, however, as she styled Audrey, her love was excessive, and found expression in a thousand acts of kindness and devotion.

But her true value was never fully known till Audrey's baby was born; an event which shortly followed her own admission into the family. Then Mary displayed a tenderness and care, and a sort of universal activity which even removed John's prejudice against her. What indeed would they have done without her? Her energetic toil provided their daily bread. She was up early and late. She managed to be every where and do everything. He no longer heeded her cross words and occasional churlishness; and began to forget his disgust at her ignorance. We say disgust, for our poor cripple, like most self-taught, and therefore *half* taught persons, who have never had the opportunity of measuring their own acquirements with others, was a little conceited, and *very* much overrated book learning.

But he began to think people might be very useful members of society even without a knowledge of the alphabet, when he beheld Mary nursing the baby, and managing the

whole house. This happy event however had made every one disposed to kindness and affection ; even old dame Page brightened up again a little, her intellect gave faint dying flashes at times, and she held the wee infant tenderly, with some consciousness, apparently, of whose it was.

But alas ! a silent foe was creeping towards that honest fire-side ; one they at all times dreaded, and feared to speak of—the gaunt fiend WANT. They had had great and unusual expenses ; they were four (five with the child) in family, and there was but one pair of hands to work for all. Audrey hesitated no longer ; she wrote to her uncle, a kind conciliatory letter, telling him of her trouble and difficulties, and asking him to be good enough to forward to her, the five pounds Miss Beaumont had given her. It was some days before an answer came.

How anxiously Audrey listened as she bent over her work for the heavy step of the carter

who generally brought their letters for them, when he went for his master's—their landlord—and how her heart sank within her as day after day passed, and the desired missive came not ! Who does not know the misery of waiting for a letter ? But it came at last ; one dreary rainy morning, when Audrey's heart was heavy, and her head confused with anxious thought. Mary bustled into the room, holding two letters in her hand—and one bore a foreign post-mark. It came from Basil. Audrey caught *that* first, and opened it eagerly, whilst the Charliewood epistle lay unheeded on her lap, and was soon clasped in baby's small hands, and sorely crumpled.

“ Johnnie, Johnnie,” she cried, pausing in its perusal. “ He is coming home ; his poor mother is dead ; he will be with us very, very soon—ah !” reading on, “ he wants a remittance ; I am to draw on the bank for a few pounds—my poor Basil ! but luckily there is my money.”

Alas ! they needed it greatly themselves, it was close on Christmas, there were many small bills to pay ; but she forgot everything at that moment, save her joy at the promised return of her husband.

“ It is such an age since he went,” she said, her eyes swimming in happy tears. “ Seven long, long months. I am so very thankful, so very glad.”

And she lifted her baby from her lap, and kissed it, and whispered a thanksgiving over it. Then, after a brief pause, she opened Jonathan’s epistle. It contained the money, and a few lines from Mrs. Dabney, which stated, in that person’s peculiar English, that Audrey’s uncle was, by no means, surprised at her coming to want ; both he and the writer had foreseen it from the first, and as they had quite given up Mrs. Findelkind from the time of her marriage, they must beg to decline any further correspondence with her.

Had Audrey received this letter without its companion, it would have pained her very much ; but now its unkindness was counter-balanced by the promise of Basil's return.

She threw Mrs. Dabney's letter to John to read, saying,

“ I will not lose a post ; I will write to Basil at once ; ” and giving her child into Mary's arms, hastened to perform her pleasant task.

Although our Audrey had had, as we have seen, a good solid English education, she was, nevertheless, slow with her pen, and now, with much to tell, and agitated by intense feeling, her readiness, as a scribe, was greatly impeded. It was, consequently, dinner-time before she had concluded her task, and then, the short afternoon, and the pelting of a heavy rain, appeared to render posting the epistle impossible ; but Audrey persisted in her resolution in spite of John's remonstrances, and

was, at last, induced to abandon it only by Mary's entreaty that the task might be entrusted to her.

"I will take the greatest care of it," she urged, "and can walk so much faster than you can, that I shall be sure both to save post, and be back afore dark. Besides, baby will cry if you leave him."

The last argument proved convincing; Audrey laid aside her shawl and bonnet, and consigned her letter to Mary's care.

"Be very careful of it," she said, as her envoy prepared to depart, "be careful of it, for you know the value of its contents."

"Never fear," replied the girl, "I'll be sure to take care."

And nodding a good-bye, she was soon out of the house, and lost to view behind the old elms. Audrey watched her from the window till she was out of sight; then, as she returned to her seat, she observed that John looked vexed and grave.

“Nay, Johnnie,” she said, in reply to his glance, “are you jealous because Mary has been a more successful pleader than yourself?”

“I have no such folly in my thoughts, Audrey ; but I am not quite easy about your letter. You had better have waited till to-morrow, and put it in the post yourself—Mary *may* lose it.”

“Nay, she is too careful for that ; she never does lose anything.”

“I wonder if she will save the post. What o’clock is it now, Audrey ?”

“I have not my watch, so I can’t tell you ; since Mary has been cook, I lend it to her.”

“And she is gone out with it ?”

“Yes ; it was thoughtless of her, she ought to have left it at home.”

The short December day waned rapidly ; the sky was prematurely darkened, even for that dark season, by masses of heavy clouds ; the wind rose and howled wildly, sending sheets of

sleet and rain against the windows. The little party gathered round the fire, and listened, in anxious silence, to the storm.

"I trust poor Mary is under some shelter," said Audrey, at length, "I wish she were at home again."

"She won't come back any more, Audrey," exclaimed dame Page, suddenly, and in a confidential whisper. "She came back to me in a storm, and she is gone in one. Johnnie was a baby like that one when she went before. She's gone for good now."

And the old woman nodded her head mysteriously. Audrey gave an involuntary shudder.

"Granny will never believe that Mary is not my mother," said John, smiling, "and she (my mother, I mean) died during a great storm, I have heard them say. I think that was why Granny took the fancy about Mary in her head."

Audrey walked to the window.

“It is a fearful night,” she said, in a low voice, “the poor girl will scarcely be able to stand against the wind. I hope she will wait in the town for the abatement of the storm.”

Mary appeared to have complied with this unheard wish instinctively, and quite in opposition to her usual way of daring all obstacles in the pursuance of her plans, for at nine o'clock she was still absent.

When the ploughman, who nightly conveyed John Page to his chamber, arrived, Audrey despatched him in search of her benighted attendant, about whose safety she was growing anxious, but at half-past ten, he returned without having met her, or heard of her, although he had been nearly into the town.

“She is going to stay at Mrs. Cowley’s till the morning, I suppose,” said Audrey, greatly perplexed ; but she, nevertheless, sat up in the vain hope of the girl’s return, till long past midnight.

The morning was bright and clear ; but it brought no Mary back again ; and now, seriously alarmed, Audrey, a second time, despatched the carter in quest of her, directing him to call at the post office, and at Mrs. Cowley's, and make enquiries after her.

He returned with the intelligence that she had not been at the post office, and that Mrs. Cowley had not seen her. What could have become of her ? To disappear thus in the day-time, and in the midst of a populous and respectable part of the town, was most extraordinary. Audrey began to imagine all sorts of probable accidents, or dangers, that might have befallen the girl, and appealed to John for his opinion. Page looked grave and vexed.

“ My dear Audrey,” he said, gently, “ do not think me uncharitable ; but I fear you trusted too much to Mary's honesty. You must remember we know very little of her ;

we have only her own testimony as to her character, and she had in her possession more money than she had probably ever seen at once, and a gold watch. I fear we shall not see her again."

"And Basil's money too ! What *shall* I do? Yet I cannot think her dishonest—she would not take her due share of her earnings, she was content and thankful for a home here. Oh, no, John, I am sure she is honest."

"But I bean't," said the carter, "I think Measter John's a'most right, for my measter and a gemmen wi' him met me as I was a coming back, and asked me what I ware a doing, and when I tould him, he said as they were a coming here about that 'ere gal; but since she'd a made off, they'd go and look arter her. The gemmen said she ware a artful thief—he did."

Audrey turned a glance of dismay on John.

"If this be true," she said, "what will be-

come of us? Where shall I get money to send to Basil?"

"Perhaps farmer Atkins may find her, and you will recover your property," replied John, "if not, we must manage in some other way."

He tried to speak cheerfully, but he was, in reality, as much distressed as his friend, for he saw the magnitude of the difficulties which encompassed them more clearly than she.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, they were startled in the midst of a sad discussion of their perplexities by a ring at the door-bell.

"Ah! perhaps it is Mary, and she may explain all," said Audrey, as she hastened to the door; but the hope was crushed when she saw Farmer Atkins and a stranger—a harsh featured, unprepossessing man—standing without.

"We are come, my dear Mrs. Findelkind," said her good-natured landlord, as she ushered

him into the parlour, "to tell you that we have set the police in search of your runaway maid-servant, and that we hope she may soon be found. Has she robbed you of anything?"

"She had with her about five pounds, and my gold watch," was the reply; "but I am very unwilling to believe her to be dishonest. She has been so very kind to me."

"Pray, ma'am, may I take the liberty of inquiring where you hired her?" asked the ill-favoured stranger.

Audrey blushed and hesitated; she knew those men would think her act of humanity an act of folly; and she dreaded their ridicule, though she would not have been led by ordinary opinion in such a case. However, she was compelled to relate the circumstance which had brought Mary under her roof. As she expected, her charity was in their eyes foolishness.

The stranger gave a loud whistle of contempt and wonder as she ended, and even the

more courteous and good-natured Atkins expressed his surprise that she should have been so very imprudent.

“I only wonder she hasn’t let in the gang of gipsies she belonged to into your house, to rob you and cut all your throats,” said the farmer; “I never heard tell of such a thing! To let a common beggar and tramp live with you, and trust her with money! Dear me! dear me!”

“Do you then know who she is?” asked John Page.

“Nay, I never saw her myself before she opened your door to me; if I had known who she was, I should have warned you against her; but my cousin here can speak to her character.”

“That I can,” said the morose-looking stranger; “she robbed me of my silver spoons and then ran away; but now I’ve got sight of her again, she shan’t escape me, I promise her.”

Audrey glanced towards John Page, and they exchanged looks.

“How did you know Mary was living here?” she asked, after an instant’s thought.

“Know? Why, I saw her; met her near the Post Office, and would have laid hold upon her, but she slipped through my fingers like an eel, and was out of sight in a minute. This plaguy rheumatism of mine prevented me from chasing her, and by the time I had called to some boys to run after her, she was clear off.”

“I begin to guess the truth,” said Audrey, greatly relieved; “the silly girl is hiding for fear of you; just as she before fled from your house.”

And she related, as correctly as regard for man’s feelings could permit, Mary’s little history of herself.

The brow of the stranger grew darker, as she proceeded.

“Bah !” he exclaimed ; “ a lie that could only have imposed on a fool or a woman. The gipsy owned to the girl having given her the spoons, for a row of coral beads, and the telling of her fortune ; and property belonging to my wife was found in her box after she was gone. I’ll punish her yet ; she shall cross the seas, and visit the kangaroos, or my name’s not Joe Smith.”

“ I am sorry your good-nature has been so imposed on, ma’am,” said the farmer, kindly ; “ but I hope we may catch the girl, and restore your property to you.”

Audrey murmured something of her hope that the money might be restored, and the two men took their leave.

“ I am sure she is honest, John,” she exclaimed, as the door closed on them, “ I quite understand her conduct. She was terrified at the sight of that stern, rude man, and is hiding from him ; she will return soon, and bring the money.”

“May you prove a true prophetess, Audrey ; but my faith in your black-eyed hand-maiden is not strong enough for me to hope much in the matter.”

It seemed as if John were to be the quicker discerner.

Some two or three hours after, farmer Atkins sent his man to tell Mrs. Findelkind that the police had caught the girl, and that he would look in, in the course of the evening, and restore his tenant's property.

“She was found amongst some of her own set, the tramps,” he added ; “and as soon as she saw the police, she began to scream and cry for help, and said they was a-robbing of her. But, of course, they wasn't a-going to be done—the p'lice—not they ! She be main and cunning, to be sure.”

CHAPTER XII.

It is time for us now to return to our friends at Paris; and here, we must observe, that the rescue Jack achieved for Miss Beaumont, and the events following it, occurred long before the admission of Mary into Audrey's household; but we have preferred following the course of events in England in an unbroken chain, and are therefore compelled to retrace our way occasionally in order of time.

The false daughter imposed on Tom Dabney

—alias Taylor—by an artifice with which Jack's suggestive questions had inspired the vagrant, was a pretty-looking girl, who at first played her part with great skill, and pleased poor Tom so much, that though he regretted the choice she had made, he overlooked her indiscretion, and offered, if she and her husband would return with him to England, to do all he could to get the organ-grinder a more respectable and settled occupation, and to hire and furnish a house for them, and board with them himself. The offer sounded attractive; and Lucy, never yet possessed of a better home than the tent or cart of the tramp, and tired for a time of the theatrical show, to which a rude talent for dancing had attached her, was dazzled by it. At first, neither *Jean* nor herself had intended to carry on the deception for more than the promised visit, when they intended to have obtained what money they could, and to have decamped next morning; but Tom's extreme simplicity, the

insight into the affair which his questions themselves gave the cunning vagrants, and the magnificent idea of a home of their own, was too great a temptation for these people to resist, and they resolved to carry on the imposition as long as possible. It was essential, of course, that they should avoid the place from which they gathered the true daughter would have come, and it was easy to effect this, by Lucy's pleading an unwillingness to return to the neighbourhood of her uncle, "who was as angry and unforgiving to her," she said, "as her dear father told her he had formerly been to himself."

And Tom was quite willing to promise that their future home should be fixed far from the spot to which both felt reluctant to return.

"I shall take them," he said, in confidence, to Jack, "I shall take them to the North of England, to some quiet place near the sea, where I can walk on the beach, and enjoy my pipe or my book without feeling that I can't

get out, as one does when one's buried inland."

"Now, if I was you," replied Jack, "I should get a neat little berth at Portsmouth or Plymouth."

"No, no," shaking his head, "there would be too many temptations for Jean—by-the-by, he says Hur is only his *second* name.—He's a wild lad, as fond of roving I can see as I was in days gone-by."

"Why don't he go to sea then?"

"Well, I did propose it; I thought man-o'-war's discipline would do him good, between you and me, and that he'd come home a better man from a long voyage; but my little lass cried her eyes out at the thought of it, and said that he would be sure to be eaten by sharks if he went to sea, and that she would go too if he must; and so she got over me. She ain't the least like her mother, who was the meekest soul that ever lived."

"Well—no offence, Tom—but considering

that your brother's a sort of petty officer in the church, I wonder he hasn't given your gal a little decent behaviour. She do rap out oaths, galore, sometimes."

"Lucy ! Lucy swears ?"

Jack nodded.

"Ay ! when Jong, as they call him—why must they always say John through their nose, I wonder ?—offends her ; and she swigs 'o-de-we,' as she calls brandy, like an old 'un."

Tom sighed.

"It is strange," he said, "Jonathan has neglected her sadly ; and poor Kate's lessons (for I am sure *she* would have taught her to be modest and sober) have been strangely forgotten, by association with her vagrant husband, if not before ; for if she had been a steady girl, she would hardly have picked up with him."

"Anyhow, she's a beauty without paint

now," muttered Jack to himself; but he refrained from expressing this opinion to the father, who, after a thoughtful whiff or two at his pipe, continued :

"I am afraid the girl takes after me. I was very wild in my youth, and fond of the company of them who was even wilder than I was. It was a scrape I got into by being bail for a fellow, who proved afterwards a great villain that sent me to sea—at least, caused me to fall in the way of the press-gang. Lucy certainly has all my young tastes—she is as fond of mimicking as I was, and clever at it too, though she can't read; she does *you* to a T, Jack."

"Much obliged to her," said Jack, gravely.

"And she dances wonderfully—I do believe she could stand on a tight rope, if she would," (he was more nearly right than he believed in this supposition) "and she's very good-natured. And then, having been often to blame myself,

it don't become me to be harsh on any one's faults, you know, Jack, let alone my own daughter's."

And poor, kind Tom looked appealingly in his friend's face.

"Oh, cert'inly not," replied Jack, "and now you have her in tow, you can teach her better things."

"I'll try, at least," he said, earnestly, "it shan't be my fault, now if she doesn't grow a steady, respectable young woman. It was my duty to have taken an observation long ago, and then matters would have been different."

"No doubt you'll do her a deal of good; you've more book-learning and a kinder heart than ere a fellow I know. But where *do* you mean to cast anchor?"

"On the Yorkshire coast. I was a good deal there in my youth, with a fellow, (he for whom I was bail) who was fond of boating. I spent many a merry day with him there, and at his old cottage near York. I wonder if it's

standing yet? There was a house too near the coast-guard station that took my fancy then, which I shall try to hire. A comfortable little place, with a bowling-green near it, and an arbour, where one might sit and smoke and look at the sea. I used to think, in those days, how happy a chap might be there."

"And I'm sure I hope you may, Tom."

"Thankye, messmate. "Shall you go back with me to England?"

Jack hesitated.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Tom, I think I'd rather see a little more of foreign parts. I should like to know more of the places on shore, and Jong has told me so much of his country, that I've a mind to go there first."

"What! to Switzerland?—for he is a Swiss, Jack, not a Tyrolese."

"Ay! to Switzerland. He says they've a lake there as big as the sea. I bade him tell *that* to the marines; but I believe, of course, that the mountains are as big as he says, and

I must say I should like to climb up Mon Blong. It must be a fine thing to see the thunder-bolts rolling like so many cannon-balls under one's feet."

"Very fine, indeed," said Tom, smiling. "Well, if you've a liking for the journey, I wish you a pleasant one. Let us see you when you come back."

"That won't be till I've spent my wages, and am ready to go to sea again."

And thus the messmates parted. Tom to settle with his supposed relatives at the home, which had charmed his youthful fancy, and Jack to indulge in a sailor's whim.

CHAPTER XIII.

TOM TAYLOR—as he was called—was destined to find, as many a man has done, that the lot he had planned for himself, and looked forward to through many a toilsome year, was not to be entirely realised. The house, indeed, on which he had fixed as his haven of rest was unoccupied, and though his eyes had grown much older since he first admired it, it really possessed such great picturesque beauty, that it did not disappoint his memory.

He furnished it neatly ; bought decent clothes for his daughter and son-in-law, and endeavoured to make Jean look like an Englishman, in which attempt (it was one of his first disappointments) he totally failed. Jean was uneasy in his respectable attire, and managed to pull it and arrange it somewhat in the style of his former garb ; he generally eschewed his hat, preferring his old cap, and had (even when he was attired with English sobriety) a very roguish as well as foreign air and appearance.

Then he absolutely refused to part from his monkey and his white mice, for which he entertained the most extravagant fondness. The monkey conceived a violent dislike for Tom, and played him all kinds of cunning and malicious tricks, but the kind hearted fellow was so touched by Jean's florid representations of the gratitude he owed to those who had once been the poor exile's only friends, and means of living, that he allowed the brute to remain. Still fond of reading, he bought a few books—

his ancient favorites—and would fain have had Lucy read them to him, but he discovered to his horror that the girl was utterly ignorant of the alphabet. Bitterly reproaching his brother for this cruel neglect of the deserted child, he at once set about remedying the evil; bought a spelling-book, and endeavoured to teach his daughter to read. Alas! He might as well have tried to fix the attention of Jacko, the monkey. She couldn't and would not learn. Gifted with wonderful capabilities for all bodily exercises, and quick as possible in understanding all that passed before her eyes, she had no power of retaining the shortest lesson in the new and difficult art of reading, nor of forming a single character of writing. She was fidgetty and restless under the restraint. Tom insisted on her studying beside him, hoping that he might be able to make matters easier to her; but it was all in vain. Her eyes and her thoughts wandered continually from her book; now she turned to him with a

question, (foreign altogether from her occupation) now with a caress, for she really loved the kind old man—and now springing up she would whistle to Jacko and make him go through a series of extraordinary tricks. Her good-natured teacher reproved her gently, but was answered by such strange and whimsical antics, that he could not resist a smile, and then Lucy, quick at perceiving her advantage, would throw the book away, catch him by the arm, and drag him into the nearest hazel wood, where she would gather him nuts, dance round his path, pretend to tell his fortune, or sing snatches of the merriest old songs he had ever heard.

One day, proceeding at an unusually late hour, to the arbour, which was the chief scene of his instructions, he heard Lucy's voice within, and paused to listen her conning—her lesson? alas! he found she was holding a conversation with Jacko, who appeared to be bearing his part in it by significant gestures, which his mistress

highly commended, and peeping through the shrubs he perceived the monkey seated in his (Tom's) chair, aping his look and manner in hideous caricature, and pretending with many mops and mows to give Lucy a lesson. The creature held the book and pencil, and as his gesticulation over each separate leaf ended, he tore it out, and flung it at his pupil, who clapped her hands and laughed with delight. Her excessive prettiness, as she sat on a stool looking up at her strange preceptor—the grotesque appearance of Jacko, and the music of her wild buoyant laugh, enchained Tom to the spot for some minutes ; but the scene was really too bad, considering the relationship Lucy bore to him whom the monkey mimicked, and summoning up all his gravity, with a face of solemn reproof, Tom Dabney presented himself before the pair.

“ Lucy, my child, “ he said, reproachfully, “ is this the way you honor your father ?”

She started up and looked frightened,

drawing back as if she feared he would strike her ; whilst Jacko showed his teeth at his host and evinced hostile intentions, brandishing the pen and the torn book.

“Don’t be angry father,” she said, “don’t thrash me.”

“Thrash you, Lucy ? I hope I am not such a coward as to strike a woman. Did your uncle ever beat you then ?”

“A many times,” said the girl, “he was a precious cross old cove.”

Tom groaned.

“He must have grown quite a monster,” he said, forgetting his anger at the late scene in his indignation at his brother, “to leave my poor child in such heathenish ignorance, and to beat her like a dog. I cannot understand how your kind, nice aunt Kitty could have allowed it, Lucy.”

“He used to thrash her too,” said Lucy, “we both cotched it.”

“The brute,” ejaculated Tom, “I could not

have believed it possible, but if he had not thus neglected you, poor child, you would not, you could not, have acted as you did."

"Anan," said the girl, staring at him.

"To leave you, not only ignorant of even your alphabet," went on Tom in soliloquy, "but of all common housewifely arts. My house is as unswept and untended as if there were no woman in it ; she can scarcely make a bed, or cook a dinner, and hardly knows the use of decent kitchen utensils. As to sewing or hemming—Oh ! oh, hilloa,"

Shouted Tom, suddenly interrupting himself with a cry of pain, for the monkey had meantime crept round behind him, and armed with a large darning needle that Lucy had dropt, stabbed it into his leg nearly to the eye. The girl rushed instantly to the rescue, beat Jacko passionately, (using epithets to him which greatly startled poor Tom, even in the midst of his pain,) and drew the weapon out.

Jacko retreated in some alarm, pursued by

Lucy, who in a few minutes returned, breathless, to the arbour, exclaiming how sorry she was, and assuring Tom that she had given Jacko up to her husband, and desiring him to beat him well.

“He shall go altogether, Lucy, I am resolved,” said poor Dabney, smarting from pain, “the brute shall not stay another day here. He will do me a serious mischief some time or other. Let me tell you that you might find a better companion than a monkey; and that reminds me of what I was going to say, when you interrupted me, by telling me of your uncle’s shameful conduct to you. It is very wicked and undutiful of you to make fun of your father; it’s a breaking of the fifth commandment, Lucy, do you know that?”

“No,” said the girl, looking puzzled, “what is it?”

Tom’s wonder at this reply did not find expression, for at the instant Jean appeared, and interrupted him by expressions of sorrow at the

injury the monkey had done him. The good-natured mountaineer really regretted it, and once more the placable sailor was coaxed into pardoning the animal, and suffering him to remain chained up in the little yard.

But Tom could not recover from the amazement into which the conduct of his supposed daughter daily threw him, and he resolved at length on writing to poor Kate, of whose death he was still ignorant, and asking why and how it was that she and his brother had so sadly failed in their duty to his poor orphan girl.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE must not, whilst narrating the adventures of our friends the Dabneys, quite neglect the recital of those which befel our fair Helen. As we have seen the enthralment of her fancy was at an end, and she could now think of her wild love with a mixed wonder and shame. So intimate and confidential was the friendship which existed between this noble father and daughter, that she did not fear to talk with him of her strange bewilderment, as she might

have done to an elder sister. Indeed our Sir Philip, like all great and good men, and all men of genius, had something feminine in his character and disposition, though nothing effeminate. His tenderness and delicacy were womanlike, and Helen never feared that he would misunderstand her, or that he would breathe a word that might reproach or wound her; so after the first soreness of mortified vanity was over, she spoke of her great mistake to her father.

“I feel now,” she would say, “as I can imagine the love bewitched personages in the ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ might have done on awaking when the spell of the flower was removed. I marvel at my own folly, even whilst I blush at my mad conduct in giving Basil that unlucky song.

“He was a noble fellow,” said Sir Philip, generously, “and I shall always regret that he was not born an English gentleman.”

“Nay, if he had been, he would not have

loved me ;” replied Helen, suppressing a sigh, “and yet I really believed he did, or I never could so far have forgotten the honor of womanhood, as to have almost proposed to him. I made the sacrifice of my pride rather for his sake than my own.”

“I believe you, Helen ; and it was quite natural that under the circumstances you should have mistaken his affectionate devotion—which of course he could never think likely to be misinterpreted—and have thought his lively admiration for love. But it was a frightful mistake to act on the delusion, my darling.”

“I know it,” she said, blushing deeply, “and have bitterly repented of it. I have learned by sad experience that a woman’s modesty is the safeguard of her happiness. I scarcely know how, but I do believe that from the moment I gave Basil the stanzas to set to music, a sort of re-action began in my own mind, and shame and disgust at myself commenced the cure of my love.”

Sir Philip bent down and kissed her brow.

“My Helen will not be imprudent again, I know,” he said. “And now, dearest, what are we to do with this lover of an evil fashion, Monsieur le Vicomte de Brissac? Shall I take legal measures for punishing him, or leave him to the chastisement of his own disappointed cupidity and his fears of what may fall on him?”

“Oh! treat him with silent contempt, by all means,” she replied; “I should have the greatest horror of affording the Parisians gossip for nine days. But I shall be glad to leave Paris soon, I don’t feel quite safe whilst we are in his neighbourhood.”

“You need be under no apprehensions; I have spoken to the Prefect of Police about him privately already, and he assures me that the wretch has left Paris.”

This conversation took place the day after Helen’s escape.

“I trust he may,” she replied; “but you

do not intend to remain much longer, do you ?”

“No ; now the weather is growing so propitious, I think we may begin to move. Whither is it your sovereign pleasure to go ?”

“I think I should like to go to Lausanne again.”

“So be it, fair lady.”

And thither, a short time afterwards, the father and daughter proceeded.

As they were about to leave the last inn on the French territory, accident or destiny added another personage to the suite of their attendants, and this was no other than our friend Jack. Helen Beaumont was proceeding from her chamber to the room in which Sir Philip waited breakfast, when her ear was caught by a familiar voice rating the “*garçon*,” in very vigorous, nautical English. Her quick sense of sound made her never forget a voice or accent once heard, and, in a moment, before she

saw the speaker, she recognised her champion the sailor. He had just exclaimed, in despair, of making himself understood—"I'd give a month's wages to any one who could make these savages understand me," when the fair vision of Miss Beaumont presented itself to his astonished eyes.

"Can I help you," she asked, smilingly ; "you have a right to any assistance I can bestow, my good friend."

"My lady !" cried Jack, in delighted surprise ; "God bless your sweet face—who would have thought of seeing you here !"

"But what has distressed you ?"

"Distressed me, ma'am ? why these rascally thieves of grinning *parley vous* have stolen my watch and all my money ; but I don't care a fig for the rhino, 'tis the loss of the keepsake you giv' me that vexes me."

"When did you lose it ? But, come with me," for a crowd of the inn-servants and in-

mates was gathering in the passage—"come and tell papa all about it. He will help you."

Sir Philip greeted his daughter's deliverer very kindly, and Jack, on being questioned, related the circumstances of the robbery, as follows—

"I had turned in for the night," he said, "and was just between sleeping and waking, when I heard somebody in my room. 'Hilloa,' cries I, starting up, 'who goes there?' '*Moi*,' says somebody. 'Who the devil's that?' says I; and the chap turned round his face, and showed a parchment-looking phiz to me. 'Pardonney Munseer,' says he, 'but I one servant to my master, Munseer le Wicount, and I tink dis room his chambre—I come in by misteek—I beg mille pardons.' 'All's well,' says I, 'but now you know it, sheer off, and shut the door.' And so he did; but I'm hanged if he didn't take my watch and money with him, for when I turned out this morning it was gone. But who'd have thought he was a thief, seeing he

was as cool as a cucumber, and had a lie ready in a minute."

"You should have fastened your door," said Sir Philip; "but we will enquire into the affair, and find out the thief, if possible."

And he rang for the host, who, of course, was greatly scandalised at such a robbery being committed beneath his roof, and who informed them that a Monsieur de Brissac had quitted the inn at daybreak, with his servants, and that probably one of the latter was the impudent robber.

The Beaumonts were startled at hearing this name; and Sir Philip resolved instantly to pursue the wretch, and ascertain what he meant, by following in their track; but Helen, terrified at the idea of a quarrel between her father and such a desperado, implored him, with tears, not to leave her, and he was obliged to content himself with dispatching his own servant, a trustworthy and intelligent man on the errand. But de Brissac had got the start

of them too many hours, and Brown could obtain no trace of him, returning about sunset to announce his ill success. He did not believe, however, he asserted, that the Viscount intended to pursue the same route with themselves ; if originally, he had meant to journey to Switzerland, he had now turned back ; fearful, perhaps, of encountering Sir Philip.

Jack began to think that he had some recollection of the face of his unwelcome visitant of the previous night, and declared that he believed, had he been wide awake, he should have recognised in him the lawyer of the old lodging-house in Paris. The poor fellow looked very blank at the prospect of utterly losing his property ; not only on account of his great value for the watch, but because the thief had left him penniless in a strange land.

As soon as Helen understood this, she would fain have supplied his loss, but Sir Philip,

after a short chat with Jack, during which he learned the simple fellow's whim about climbing the Alps, was so amused with him, that he proposed, instead of giving him money, (of which he might be robbed again at the next inn,) they should take him with them to Switzerland, and let him remain as one of their family till they returned to England.

“And in what capacity will you employ him?” asked Helen, laughing, “as my especial 'Squire and attendant—my page of honour?”

“If you like; but, seriously, we may find him useful in many ways, especially in our boating on the Lake, and it is for this occupation that I shall ostensibly engage his services, to satisfy his honest pride and his unwillingness to be paid for his former gallantry.”

Jack was very grateful for the proffered service—accepted it gladly—and from that moment became Helen's devoted attendant; pay-

ing her a thousand rude and yet gentle courtesies; whilst she delighted in his quaint frankness and untutored civility, and made much of her rough pet, who had never been so well off before in the whole course of his toilsome and adventurous life.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. DABNEY'S answer to Tom's letter of enquiry was by no means calculated to remove the delusion he was under as to his relationship to Lucy. He had not of course written in his own name. Feigning himself an old friend and companion of Tom Dabney's, he besought Kitty to give him some information respecting his family; telling her that he had by chance met with a girl who professed to be poor Tom's daughter, but that the neglected

state of her education, and her being the wife of a wandering Swiss, who was a street musician, made him doubt the assertion, and dread some imposition.

Mrs. Dabney replied by informing him that Mr. Dabney's first wife was no more; that *she* was the present Mrs. Dabney; and that she was by no means surprised at the condition in which he had found Tom Dabney's daughter, the girl having been, (in *her* opinion,) very badly brought up, and having since run away with a foreigner, who was no better than he should be.

There was no longer a doubt. Kate had evidently died whilst his poor girl was still a baby, Tom thought, and the entire neglect of her uncle might fairly be ascribed to the unamiable enditer of this sharp, cross epistle; from that moment Lucy found every excuse for her faults in her (supposed) father's pity and self-reproach at having so long forgotten her;

and was petted and indulged, and seldom crossed in her wildest freaks.

Thus the little family jogged on for some time in tolerable peace and comfort, till spring roused the dormant spirit of migration, which was as strong in Jean as in birds of long wanderings, and he began to murmur at the dulness of their mode of life. Lucy did not, however, prove a sympathetic listener. She had, with a woman's power of adaptation, grown used to a sheltered life; she, the poor nursling of the hedge and the wild common, luxuriated beside the comfortable hearth, and learned to love, and even, after her manner, to reverence the kind, blithe, good-hearted man, who called her child. She would not consent to abandon her new home even for Jean's sake, and she succeeded in coaxing him into suffering her to remain behind, by representing to him that she would thus be able to secure him a winter retreat.

They devised between them, therefore, an excuse for Jean's departure—a cunning fiction of an aged kinsman ill, and lonely in a strange land, who had sent to call the Swiss to his bed-side ; and Tom, not only assented to the propriety of his obeying the summons, but generously gave him a little money to buy comforts for the sufferer, and was not sorry when his unwelcome son-in-law bade them adieu, taking with him his monkey and organ.

“I should not be sorry if he never returned,” thought Tom, as he regarded these signs of permanent departure, “unless it were for Lucy's sake ; but the poor girl doesn't appear to regret his going, or suspect that it may be for ever. It is a merry, wild wench ; I wonder if she has deep affections ?”

We may reply “Ay,” all wild and untutored as she was ; and in those affections Tom was rapidly securing a high place. She began to try and please him in the manner she

saw best suited to his tastes ; she strove to learn, from the handy old sailor, neat and comfortable ways and habits ; and she watched to fill his pipe, and learned his sea-songs to sing to him, whilst he smoked ; she walked with a graver step, spoke in a lower key, and abjured altogether her evil habits of swearing.

Tom grew proud of her, and even fancied he traced a likeness of expression between this sparkling nut-brown maid and his lost wife.

One evening, late in the year, as Lucy was sitting in the porch waiting the return of her father from a long walk, and carolling blithely the words of an old song, she was startled by the whine of a beggar close beside her, craving charity.

“ If you please, my lady, and I’m starving ; for two days I haven’t put a morsel of food between my lips—please to bestow your charity on a poor starved old woman.”

The girl started as if she had been shot,

turned her glittering eyes on the suppliant, then drawing back with an expression of fear on her countenance, ejaculated involuntarily.

“Granny !”

“What !” shrieked the crone, with an oath, (for the recognition was mutual) “is it you, you good-for-nothing little wretch ?”

“Yes, it is me,” said the girl, summoning all her courage, “and it ain’t no use to be coming uttering lies to me. *I* knows you have had a good dinner, whoever’s barn-door found it. So you’d better be off, Granny.”

“Be off !” screamed the hag, a torn, dirty, evil-countenanced vagrant, “be off ! Is that your manners to your own flesh and blood ? Oh ! you wicked wretch ! but I shan’t go till you shell out, for you ain’t so fine—who but you—without having the rhino in your pocket. I’ve a great mind to strip you of your flash clothes, and make you go along o’ me at once, and so I will if you don’t come down hand-

some, and tell me how it is you's here, and all about it."

"You can't do no such thing," said Lucy, bravely, "for I'm married—look here," she held up her finger, "Jean put this on in his own country, for fear if we ever comed back, you *would* be a trying to get me away from 'un; but *that* keeps me safe. You can't go for to touch me now."

The hag advanced a step, shaking her stick vindictively; but Lucy faced her bravely, and called on Tom's dog Trim, who, forthwith, made his appearance from within the house, where he had been growling at the beggar, and made such hostile demonstrations, that the crone retreated, and, in a humble tone, begged Lucy to call him off.

"I winna hurt ye, gal," she added, "you were always a peart one, and your old granny a'ways spiled ye; but do ye tell us what ye are doin' of here, and how you got them flash clos'; be ye a servant?"

"No," said Lucy, "this is Jean's house as well as mine—we lives here."

"Then take me in, and gi' me a meal and a night's shelter."

"I'll give ye a supper to take away; but I can't let you come into the house," said Lucy, resolutely, "it belongs to a good friend of ours; but he wouldn't take you in—and you'd better go before he comes home, for he can't bear a tramp."

"How come he to like you and Jean, then?" said the old woman, grinning.

Poor Lucy was sadly puzzled, especially as, at that minute, she distinguished the figure of Tom approaching the house across the ripe, brown cornfields. It was absolutely necessary, for her safety, to get rid, at once, of the beggar, who could make such terrible disclosures. She drew out of her pocket a tiny piece of gold.

"Here, granny," she said, hurriedly, "take

this, and go away at once. He's coming, who will punish you if he sees you—go quickly."

"Gold!" cried the beggar, as she clutched it eagerly; "ah! ah! I thought I'd make you come down wi' it. Well, good night, Loo; I'll come and see ye agen soon."

And nodding her shaking head, the old woman turned away, but to Lucy's terror, advanced up the very path Tom was traversing, and lingered for him to reach the spot on which she stood. They only who have had a guilty secret, which chance threatens each instant to destroy, can fully understand the alarm felt by the spectator of the scene that followed. How her heart beat, and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, and how she longed to be able to distinguish what the crone said, when she stood face to face with the sailor, and he spoke with her. She strained her hearing in the vain act of listening to those few off tones in vain! and then tried to guess

what passed by their gestures. Ah ! the old woman was begging, and was coaxing him to have his fortune told, and he shook his head laughingly. She was certain he spoke those trite old words—"he knew his fortune now too well,"—and then the crone begged, and he gave her a penny, and passed her, and came quickly on towards his home ; Lucy gave a deep sigh of relief ; and when he called to her in his own wonted jovial way, " Well, Luce, my darling, hast had thy fortune told ?" the re-action of feeling was so great, that she had difficulty in repressing her tears. Tom was amazed and yet pleased at the strange ardour with which she welcomed and kissed him, and said, (as, clinging to him, they entered the house together.

" Did the old woman frighten ye, Luce, that you look so white ? or has she told you a bad fortune ?"

" She did frighten me," said Lucy, " for I was all alone, and she is fierce and strong, for

all she looks so feeble. I thought she was going to beat me."

"If I had known she had been impudent, I wouldn't have given her a penny, Luce; she did look like a cheat, but it is better to be taken in now and then, than to turn away from a poor soul who may be hungry. I couldn't sleep o'nights if I thought a woman hungered that I might have fed."

"You are very good, very kind, father," said the girl, "if all the people who has money was like you, it would be a nice world—but she ain't hungry, not she."

"Really, my little Loo, you are a little uncharitable to the old woman—you can't be sure she was a cheat."

"But I'm sure she is," cried the girl, with vivacity; "she was an impudent old wretch, who would have robbed me I'm certain, if you had not come up. Promise me that you won't speak to her, nor help her no more."

"Fie, fie, child; get my tea and don't

abuse your poor kinsfolk—we are all brothers and sisters, remember, and we shouldn't abuse or judge each other. God help the poor soul, and make her better, if she's a cheat or a thief, but we'll hope she's only poor."

Lucy retreated, muttering, and was soon busied preparing Tom's evening meal.

"I have given the old wretch the money he gave me for buying food," she said to herself, "it cuts my heart to think I have robbed him, kind, good heart! I will feed on a crust till I have made it up again."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE same red sunset that witnessed this scene outside Tom Dabney's cottage, shone upon a far different one in another land. The Beaumonts, attended by Jack, who acted as steersman, and accompanied by an old friend who had recently joined them, were floating in Sir Philip's pretty boat upon the dark blue bosom of the Lake of Geneva.

The glory of the ripe season, the calm of the hour, and the harmony of sentiment and

opinion between the trio who enjoyed it together, gave Helen a feeling of the most perfect and full contentment she had ever known. Her eyes wandered from the glowing heavens to the many tinted mountains, from the mountains to the rippling waters, from the waters to the faces of her father and his friend, and a low sigh escaped her. It caught the ear of the latter, and he turned inquiringly towards her.

“A sigh, Miss Beaumont,” he said, “what can you sigh for at such a moment as this?”

“Indeed I do not know; from pleasure I believe, for I never enjoyed the lake so entirely before. We only want music to make the harmony of the hour complete.”

“Music!” he shrugged his shoulders; “I think the harmony is perfect without it. The murmur of the waves, and the sigh of the breeze are serenade enough for the hour.”

“You do not like music, Mr. Vaux?”

“Will you entertain a great contempt for

me if I own the truth? I do not. I believe I am thus far like Harry Hotspur."

"I'd rather hear my brach howl in Irish."

Helen looked vexed.

"You will withdraw your good opinion (if ever bestowed) from such a barbarian henceforward, I am afraid," he said, laughingly, "but it is my misfortune, and not my fault. I have no ear. By the words only can I distinguish "God save the queen" from "Rule Britannia."

"I am sorry for your own sake; you lose an exquisite pleasure."

"Perhaps; but never having known it, I do not miss it. Music is a very pretty gift in a fair lady, but when a man parades it I cannot help thinking it effeminate and contemptible."

Helen coloured very deeply, and made no answer. Her father saw her distress, and answered for her; an eloquent champion for the magic of sweet sounds. The argument grew animated. Mr. Vaux uttering all sorts

of heresies against "divine harmony," to which Miss Beaumont listened with a vexation that astonished herself. What did it matter to her whether Henry Vaux liked music or not? Why was she always pained when she found that his taste or opinions differed from her own? She did not answer the question. The dispute terminated laughingly, by Mr. Vaux saying that to convince Sir Philip and Miss Beaumont, he was willing to imbibe their passion for music,—if possible,—he would request Jack, the coxswain, to favour them with a sea ditty forthwith. Jack obeyed orders, though rather bashfully, and sang a most lugubrious ballad which had, however, the singular power of eliciting a smile from all his hearers.

Henry Vaux was a distant connexion of Sir Philip's; he had entered the navy as a boy; but just as he received his lieutenant's commission, the death of his elder brother made him master of one of the finest estates and noblest fortunes in England, and he gave

up the sea to fulfil other duties on land. He had been some seven years in possession of his inheritance, and was still unmarried, though few of the fairest in the kingdom would have refused him. It was singular that such should be the case, considering the affectionate disposition and social temper of the young Cœlebs ; but the cause of his indifference might be found in an excessive and jealous pride which was the great and prevailing fault of his character. As a younger brother, whom a strict entail left with a bare competence, his reception amongst the people who now courted him, had been at times mortifying to his vanity ; and the homage now paid—as experience had taught him—to *les beaux yeux de sa cassette* revolted and mortified him still more.

He would be loved for himself alone, or he would die unmarried, was his firm resolve ; and distrusting every one, the incipient misanthrope left England to lose the *ennui* of a life without a care in the excitement of travel.

On the shores of the lake of Geneva he had met one of his old boat's crew, and prime favorites, our friend Jack, and on questioning him as to what he was doing there, received from the seaman such a rapturous account of Miss Beaumont and her father, that he was tempted to renew an old acquaintance with the latter on the score of the connexion of their families. Sir Philip, between whom and his distant kinsman there existed a strong mental as well as personal likeness, was glad to welcome Harry Vaux (whom he had known as a midshipman) to his house, and in a short time the young man took up his residence beneath their roof, as Sir Philip's guest, to the satisfaction of all parties, and the unbounded delight of Jack, who divided his affections between his sometime-officer and his young lady.

Vaux was charmed with Helen. Her proud indifference to admiration, her carelessness as to whether she pleased or not, her beauty, of which she evidently never thought, her un-

affected and stately grace ; the masculine energy of her intellect ; in short, the absolute absence of all “ young ladyism ” in her character accorded with his prejudice and taste, and though his fastidiousness on some points made him fear to commit himself by a proposal, before he was certain on some points which he deemed essential, he was already secretly her lover. Time passed swiftly along, and as the scene took a tinge of winter, and the blue lake lost its smooth mirror-like beauty, the little party began to talk of returning to England.

They were sitting one day after dinner discussing their future plans, and thinking with regret of their coming separation, when the butler entered, and spoke to Sir Philip in a low voice.

“ To see me on business,” said the Baronet, aloud ; “ who, or what is he, Brown ? ”

“ A Tyrolese, Sir Philip. He wears their dress, and speaks their language.”

“ What can he want ? Well, show him in,

if he is in such haste. Miss Beaumont and Mr. Vaux will excuse it."

The man withdrew, and in a few seconds returned, ushering a peasant, in the costume of the Tyrol, into the room. The stranger, who was a strong, tall mountaineer, with a fine countenance, held a roll of paper in his hand, and bowed low to the lady as he entered.

"You come from a country we are well acquainted with," said Sir Philip, after returning his unbidden guest's greeting, in his own language; "what is your business with me?"

"To solicit your aid," replied the stranger, "in a holy enterprise. I need not tell Sir Philip Beaumont, of the severity of winter on the Aalberg; he has visited our eternal snows, and seen beside the path-side the bones of those who have perished in the death blast, unsheltered and alone. I am wandering through Europe, gathering from the charity of the

rich, the means of building on the mountain summit a hospital for these poor wayfarers, such as Religion has erected on that of the Mont St. Bernard.”

The Tyrolese spoke in a patois, but with an eloquence of eye and countenance that greatly aided his abrupt and simple statement; indeed, such truth and honesty were stamped upon his face, that even Vaux, who was naturally distrustful, did not forthwith condemn the petitioner as an imposter.

The Tyrolese continued—

“When, as a servant boy, I followed my master to church, bearing his sword, my heart often ached as I looked upon those parched and withered bones, and I vowed to God and our Lady that I would do something for the precious lives of those who climbed the mountains. I began to save a few guilders from my wages; in time I had gathered 1,000—but very slowly. I saw that the hoardings of my

life would not suffice to build a place of refuge, and I resolved to go forth and ask my brethren, beseeching them, for the holy Jesu's sake, to help the wayfarer and the perishing. And they have listened to me, and answered to the call. Look, Messieurs, et Mademoiselle," and he unrolled a parchment, "here are the names of sovereign princes and mighty chiefs, and those of the poorest herdsmen of Germany, side by side, all giving according to their means, to the good work. Will you add yours?"

Helen stole to her father's side, and looked over his shoulder at the paper. Her bright eyes glistened with tears, as she read a very simple and eloquent appeal, written by a Pastor of the Tyrol, to which many royal and noble names were appended, promising large sums to Heinrich *Findelkind* for the proposed house of refuge; as the name caught her eyes, Miss Beaumont blushed deeply, and looked up at her father. He understood her.

“Findelkind,” he said, gravely, “are you all related to my *protégé*, the singer Basil?”

“I am of his family,” was the reply; “but I would not claim your charity on his account, Sir Philip; rather in a Holy Name do I beg of you.”

“Are you nearly related?”

“No; very distantly.”

“You will give to the *Hospice*, papa? And you, too, Mr. Vaux?” asked Helen, eagerly.

Vaux bowed assent.

“Set our liberality an example, Helen,” said her father.

She rang for pen and ink, and gave a munificent sum immediately.

“I owe a thank-offering,” she said, “for my own rescued life in the Tyrol, and so do you, papa. Now show how you estimate me.”

She gave him the pen.

“May *I*, likewise, prove my gratitude for not having been deprived of the pleasure of

your acquaintance?" said Vaux, colouring slightly.

"Oh yes! assuredly, I am delighted to be of some value, for the sake of the purpose my price will be devoted to. Charming!" she added, with animation, "papa has rated me very handsomely; now, Mr. Vaux!"

He took the pen, and trebled her father's sum. She accepted the courtesy with playful acknowledgements.

"Ah!" she continued, "there goes our friend Jack; call him in, Mr. Vaux, and see what *he* will give as my value."

Vaux opened the French window, admitted the seaman, and briefly told him what Miss Beaumont wished.

"Now, Jack," she said, smiling, "name my value, and papa shall pay it for you."

Jack twirled his hat.

"There ain't no price high enough for you, Miss," he said, after a minute's pause.

“Bravo !” cried Vaux, “Jack has said that which I dared not. You *are* priceless, Miss Beaumont. Jack, you must have a glass of wine to drink that sentiment.”

“But I shall be happy to give what I can to the poor souls,” added the sailor, after acknowledging the offer, “if his honour will permit.”

“Willingly,” replied Sir Philip.

And the sailor’s little offering was placed beside his officer’s munificent donation.

As the Baronet forgot to dismiss him, he remained standing quietly in the room, whilst Findelkind, whose imagination was inflamed by dwelling on the subject, detailed the horrors of the Alpine winter in the figurative and poetical language of the mountaineers. Of course his words were unintelligible to Jack ; but he watched, with great interest, the speaker’s animated countenance and gestures. Findelkind’s listeners were touched and pleased

with his zeal, and their sympathy was still more powerfully excited, when he told them that very recently, during a fierce storm of wind, which even they had felt, an avalanche, followed by a mighty piece of rock, had fallen, and shut up the access to a small village at no great distance from the spot he had fixed on for the site of the Hospice.

His description of the awful scene, and of the melancholy tolling of the bell for aid from the village church behind the storm-barrier, was most animated.

“But the village is not actually buried?” asked Helen, eagerly.

“No, Mademoiselle ; that is to say, the houses are not covered with snow, but there is no longer a possibility of the inhabitants obtaining food, or ever issuing from the place ; when the provisions they have, are consumed they must die of hunger. Oh ! there is nothing half so terrible as the faint, dimmed

sound of their bell tolled daily yet, as if to shew that they still live. It smote upon my very heart."

He shuddered, and hid his eyes for a moment with his hand.

"And can nothing be done? Can they not be extricated?" asked Helen, pale with pity.

"Alas no! there is no possible access even for the practised foot of the mountaineer. Death has them in his icy clutches—there is no human help for them."

Helen looked so much distressed that Jack moved by her looks, ventured to draw near Vaux's chair and whisper a humble enquiry as to what the fellow had said that vexed his young lady. Vaux answered aloud; repeating in brief clear words the subject that had called forth Heinrich's eloquence. The sailor looked astonished.

"Why they ain't going to let the folks die

besieged by snow, sure-ly your honour?" he said.

"What remedy, Jack; he says it is impossible to help them."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the sailor, with a slight accent of contempt; "he's a lubber to think so. But that's what the enemy has thought many a time, and we've profited by it. You remember, Mr. Vaux, sir, how British seamen once carried cannon up a rock, which the French thought that we couldn't climb ourselves? I forget the name of the place, but I've often heard my messmates tell of it."

"And do you think, Jack," asked Helen, eagerly, "that if you were there you could help these poor people?"

"Well, it wouldn't become me to boast, miss, but I'd do my best, and with plenty of rope, and a little gumption, I do think one might get over anything."

"I am rather of your opinion, Jack," said

Mr. Vaux. "What say you, shall you and I set forth on this adventure."

"With all my heart, sir."

"But," said Helen, her pity suddenly yielding to a terrible fear, "you would peril your own life by such an attempt, Mr. Vaux. No; pray don't think of it."

"It does not follow that I shall run any risk, Miss Beaumout, or, at least, no more than one does daily and hourly. I am so far a fatalist, that I believe death will only find me at the appointed time."

"No," chimed in the privileged seaman, "every bullet carries its billet, and they that's born to be hanged won't be drowned."

"Very consolatory and flattering," said Vaux, gravely. "With such a creed, fair lady, won't you send forth your devoted knight and squire upon this adventure?"

"Are you really in earnest, Mr. Vaux?"

"Yes, indeed I am," he replied, "I should scarcely, with my present impressions, feel

justified in not going to the spot, at least, and seeing if anything can be done. *You*, I am sure, would be first to venture your own life for others, if it were necessary."

"But this would be madness. So wild a scheme! Even their countryman, who must best know the nature of the casualty, says it is impossible to help them."

"They are skilful in climbing, these Tyrolese, but, I doubt, Miss Beaumont, if simple herdsmen can have the quickness of invention, and the readiness at expedients peculiar to seamen, not to speak of their want of mechanical skill and appliances; now, I shall take with me every mechanical contrivance I think the case may require, as well as plenty of hands; and engaging also the services of the Tyrolese and their companions, and directing their exertions, I may do some good; at least, it is worth making the effort."

Helen could say no more; she feared lest Vaux should despise her womanish and (for his

sake) selfish fears ; besides, why should *she* be so anxious for his safety.

Sir Philip was pleased with the energy and humanity of the young man, and by no means deemed the enterprise hopeless. He began discussing it more in detail, and translated the recent conversation to his guest. Findelkind shook his head at first ; but his own nature fully responded to the gallantry and humanity of the seaman, and finally he proposed accompanying them, and aiding them in their wild adventure. There was no time to be lost, and prompt in action as in thought, Vaux decided on making every preparation and necessary provision for the expedition that very night, in order to start at daybreak the next morning.

For this purpose, Sir Philip, Jack, and Findelkind, at once went into the town, and Helen was left alone. Never had any time appeared so long to her as the following two hours. She could not bear to think of Vaux incurring such risk ; she almost hated Findel-

kind for relating the entombed people's ill fortune, and themselves for being in peril. Helen's usually heroic train of thought and feeling sank before the dawning selfishness of a new love. She was still sitting in troubled and anxious thought when Vaux returned. He was alone, having accidentally parted from Sir Philip and the seaman; nor did he regret the mistake when he found that it enabled him to spend a few minutes *tête-à-tête* with Miss Beaumont.

"And you really are resolved to go to-morrow, on this Quixotic enterprise?" she asked, after he had explained his single re-appearance.

"I am, indeed; and happily I have found all the aids I require for its achievement in the shape of mechanism. You believe that I am going to attempt the impossible, Miss Beaumont? Well, perhaps so; but if the apparent impossible were not sometimes attempted, little that is great or good would be performed. I

thought you of a more hopeful and daring temperament."

"Perhaps if I were to be a partaker of the exploit, I might fear it less, but it is distressing to think of a friend's leaving me to meet such imminent danger."

"Ah!" he said, "you are too kind to think of me thus; if I perish, it will be pleasant, even in death, to think that you regretted me. And you only will mourn for me, I have no mother—no one to love me, Helen."

He took her hand gently.

"Tell me," he said, "if I return, will you make the world less a desert for me? will you be my wife?"

She murmured something; he bent down to catch the whispered words, when, at that instant the door flew open, and sir Philip entered.

"Vaux! are you here," he cried, "we could not fancy what had become of you.

The man from Le Grosdidier's is waiting below with the ropes you wanted, will you go and look at them?"

Vaux would fain have told Sir Philip that he could not spare a moment then; but he was not sure of Helen's answer, and the shyness of his proud and sensitive character restored him. He rose, and muttering some confused words, left the room.

Little chances form the thread which holds the sword of destiny suspended over us. Some such trifling incidents as this—a "*facheux*" interrupting us, or breaking in on a conversation, will frequently change the whole colour of our life.

If Helen had then spoken, she would have parted from Vaux as his affianced wife; but the opportunity was lost, and not only so, but no moment for him to re-ask, or for her to answer his question, occurred. By some strange freak of fate, Sir Philip never left them that night, and at daybreak Vaux departed. He

left, however, a letter for Helen, in which he renewed his proposal, confessing to her all his little prepossessions and prejudices frankly and nobly, and congratulating himself that she flattered them all, and far exceeded his *beau ideal* of a perfect woman.

“I dare hope that this epistle will not be tedious to you,” he added, “at least, if I did not too presumptuously interpret your manner, and the expression of your face, when you said, ‘good night,’ and I shall long for my return to hear the hope confirmed by your own lips. I am so happy, even with the hope, that I am glad to make such a sacrifice to Fortune as my brief absence will be, in order to propitiate her fickleness. I have long resolved that I would never marry till I met with a woman who could give me her first love, and an undivided heart and memory. Your proud modesty assures me that *if you love me*, such must be the case.”

This passage marred all the happiness the

other part of the letter had bestowed on Helen. She started and trembled. What would he think of her when he should know that her first love had been another's, and that other a peasant? He, the proud, fastidious, delicate Vaux! Her knowledge of his character convinced her that he *could* not forget it, even if his love led him to wed her in spite of his prejudice, and there could be no happiness with such a memory in his heart.

Poor Helen! never till that moment had she weighed all the consequences of a woman's forgetting the dignity of her sex. Alas! who can tell to what precipice a single false step may lead.

To her honour, be it spoken, she never dreamed of deceiving Vaux, even by a silent acquiescence in his supposition. She would tell him all the truth, at least, and then leave her fate to his love; thus she thought one moment; the next, her pride counselled her to refuse him, and spare herself the pain of confession,

and the shame of a possible rejection. But this latter resolution was difficult to make, for love is stronger than pride in a genuine woman's heart, and she is ever ready to find an excuse for selfishness in the sophistry by which she persuades herself, that she is studying another's feelings rather than her own.

Sir Philip had no suspicion of the state of affairs between his daughter and guest, till Helen placed Vaux's letter in his hand—never would she have another secret from that beloved father—and he rejoiced at the prospect of such an alliance, and laughed at her fears.

“Trust me, my Helen,” he said, “Vaux will laugh at your girlish folly, and honour you for subduing it, and confessing it so bravely. I like my future son-in-law, even though he will take from me my chief treasure. Ah! Helen, I shall have a heavy miss of you.”

And the father's eyes filled with tears.

“Papa, I will not leave you if it makes you unhappy.”

“Nonsense, child ! I could not permit such devotion as that ; besides, I am sure Vaux will let us be together as much as possible.”

CHAPTER XVII.

WE have now brought the other personages of our story to the same point of time at which we left Audrey dismayed at the sudden incarceration of her handmaid, that is the December of the year 18—, and it is time that we resumed the neglected thread of our web, which has so long hung untouched, and weave into the tapestry a picture of the events which have occurred in the lonely cottage since Mary was accused of theft.

Farmer Atkins, as he had promised, brought back Mrs. Findelkind's property, and Audrey was grateful for the recovery of the money, which was of such importance to Basil; but she steadily refused to believe that Mary had intended to appropriate it, and she explained her reasons for disbelief in what appeared a self-evident fact, by relating to her landlord what the girl had formerly told her. He shook his head with a very unconvinced expression of countenance.

"I'm afraid she imposed on you, Mrs. Findelkind. The old woman, to whom she sold or gave the spoons, was one of the gang, amongst whom she was now caught quarrelling apparently over their spoils."

Audrey looked perplexed.

"That might also have been one of the singular chances which form links in what people call circumstantial evidence, Mr. Atkins, and you know that it has often proved mis-

taken and false. My heart acquits my poor Mary, and reminds me of a thousand instances of honesty, and even generosity, which set her above such suspicion."

"Well, all I can say, ma'am," replied the farmer, jocosely, "is, that you are kinder than most folks, who always believe the worst in every case; and if I was ever to be tried for anything, I'd like to have you on the jury."

"Could I see Mary?" asked Audrey, anxiously; "I must go into the town to-morrow to send off this letter, and I should very much like to see her, if possible,"

"Well, I can get you into the jail, if such be your wish, ma'am; but I'm sure the gal don't deserve so much at your hands; I'm going to drive in myself to-morrow on business--if it's any accommodation to you, I'll give you a seat in the tax cart."

Audrey gladly accepted the offer, and the

farmer, promising to call for her early, departed.

“You are very sanguine and confiding, Audrey,” said John, when they were alone. “Appearances are fearfully against Mary.”

“And greatly in her favour also,” she said, eagerly; “have you forgotten her entire unselfishness—her unceasing kindness to us? How could one so generous be a common thief?”

“She loves you—you were the first person ever kind to her, except her father, who died years ago. I have heard her say so, many times. Perhaps her affection was reforming her.”

“Don’t talk so, please Johnnie. I can’t bear that baby should have been nursed and fondled by a thief. No; I know she is innocent. Remember how kind she was.”

“Dear, I have read in that old Annual Register, farmer Morgan lent us, of a murderer, who was, after his great crime, careful not

to tread upon an insect, so sacred had human life grown in his eyes."

"What has that to do with Mary?" said Audrey, impatiently, "don't always judge by what books teach you, Johnnie. I think they are not half such safe guides as our own hearts, except, indeed, our Shakespeare, and, of course, *THE BOOK!*"

John smiled, and was silent, and Audrey tried to soothe her momentary feeling of irritation by pacing the room with her baby in her arms, and humming a lullaby.

Farmer Atkins was faithful to his promise the next morning; drove Audrey first to the lawyer's, (where her little business was speedily transacted, and she learned that the bank intended to pay a shilling in the pound) and next to the prison, where his influence with the governor procured her permission to see and speak to Mary, apart from the other prisoners.

The door of the little room near the prison-yard, where Audrey and the farmer waited for the girl, was open, and Audrey heard her, as she approached, ask the turnkey, in an eager voice,—“Who it was that wanted to see her?”

“The gemmen as brought you here with the police yesterday,” was the reply, “and a lady.”

“A lady! Oh if—”

But at that moment Mary caught sight of Audrey, and interrupted herself with a cry of joy.

“Oh, it is, it is my mistress. Oh, ma’am— Oh my dear mistress.”

And hurrying into the room, she rushed up to Audrey; then suddenly stopping, clasped her hands and burst into an agony of tears.

“Nay, said Audrey, tenderly, “my poor girl, what have you done.”

“Oh, indeed, indeed, I never was going to rob you,” she sobbed, “indeed and I wasn’t;

I was going to bring you back the letter and the watch. I run away because I was afeard of Master Gubbins, and I was coming back, when they tramps met me, and would have took away the watch, and I was fightin' for it when the police came up."

Audrey looked at Farmer Atkins.

"You see it is just as I said," she remarked, "I knew she was innocent."

"Well," said the farmer, "you *are* easy to be—I won't say gulled to a lady neither; but if she gets ere a jury in England to believe *that* gammon, my name isn't George Atkins. Why, gal, you know very well that you was with the very same identical tramp, that you gave the spoons to."

"I *didn't* give her the spoons," cried the young prisoner, vehemently, "I didn't. I always tried to be honest, that I did. I don't ought to be here with all them bad people. Oh, do please, my dear mistress," turning with a sudden change of tone to Audrey, "do ask

them to make haste and either let me out or punish me at once. I can't bear the dreadful folks I'm with now."

"But I expect you'll have to take a long voyage with them, my lass," said the farmer, "if appearances are to be trusted and witnesses believed."

"That horrid old woman," cried Mary, "Oh, ma'am," to Audrey, "it was the very same wretch who was with the gang that stopped me; and because I abused her, as who wouldn't, for stealing the spoons, she says she'll transport me. Oh dear, oh dear, what shall I do?"

And she wept bitterly.

Audrey greatly moved, took her hand, and spoke kindly and tenderly to her.

"We will see what can be done," she said, "to save you from the danger your cowardice has brought on you. I will go back to Mr. Findelkind's lawyer, and he shall see what can

be done, for I *do* believe you quite innocent, my poor Mary."

"God bless you for those words," she sobbed, "but I knew you wouldn't think me a thief. I was sure sure you couldn't. Oh! my kind mistress, how I love you."

And she kissed Audrey's hand passionately.

"Be comforted, said her friend, gently, "and put your trust in God—pray to Him, and He will hear you."

"How can I pray? They would not let me for swearing and noise."

"In and with your *heart* you can, Mary; pray, too, for the poor creatures who are your fellow prisoners, and don't speak harshly to them; thus you may even grow better amidst evil companions."

"I will mind every word you say," exclaimed Mary, earnestly. "I will try to do all you wish me, that I will; for you are the only wise person in the world; all the others are ill-natured fools."

“Keep a civil tongue in your head, young woman,” said the turnkey.

Audrey laid her finger on her lips, with an air of reproof; Mary blushed.

“I won’t again,” she said, “but they *do* make me so angry.”

“Remember, then, and for my sake use gentle words and prayers. They will shut out the ill noise round you, and you will come forth better than you went into jail, Mary, and I shall love you more. Now, I must go.” Farmer Atkins had looked impatiently at his watch. “God be with you, Mary. Trust in Him.”

And drawing the poor girl to her, she kissed her cheek.

“Well !” ejaculated the farmer, as he good-naturedly drove Audrey back to the lawyer’s, “if it isn’t a pity you were not born a parson, Mrs. Findelkind ! That gal looked quite tamed by you ; and somehow I feel a bit better myself for what you said—gentler like.”

“Poor Mary is very ignorant. Ah, Mr. Atkins, and how many, many more within those walls have done wrong because they knew no better.”

“Ah, that ain’t the case quite, either,” said the farmer, “many a rogue is a clever fellow, and has had schooling—and I can’t say that I think all the teaching the people get now makes them any the better ; the newspapers don’t go to show that.”

“I don’t understand much about it,” replied Audrey, modestly—she did not like to express her opinions too freely to such a grave, fatherly man—“but it seems to me, we begin the wrong way. Don’t you think if we educate people’s hearts first, it would be better—instead of beginning with their heads?”

“If their hearts were like yours I’m sure there would not be any need of prisons,” said farmer Atkins, smiling, “*yours* has been well taught to be sure, but then what would my friend the governor do?”

Audrey smiled also, and made no answer. She could not argue. She knew better what she meant than she could express; but her example—loving and gentle woman that she was—taught better than her words.

The lawyer undertook at her suit to do all the law could for Mary, though he shook his head and pronounced it a very bad case; appearances being so much against her; and Audrey, a little consoled by having thus done her best for her poor friend, and moreover dispatched Basil's remittance, returned to her own fireside in better spirits, to recount to John all her adventures during her excursion, and the particulars of her first visit to a prison.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHRISTMAS was come; the season Audrey had once loved so much, and to which she had been wont to look forward through the long work-a-day year; but, alas! the Holy time, save in those blessed memories with which it is ever rife, was a dull and cheerless one. The Heavens were dark with sullen hoards of snow, not yet fallen, and the wind wailed and whistled over the fields, and shook every casement of the old house, making its way through many a

chink, and driving the little family closer round the fire by its piercing breath ; from afar came the toll of the church bell, a summons which Audrey (for the first time, at that season) could not obey ; and while it stole on her ear, waking as the airy voice ever does, all kinds of long slumbering thoughts and memories, she pressed her infant to her heart, as if seeking to find comfort for the loss of her merry girlhood in her new blessing. John Page noticed and understood the action.

“Never mind, Audrey,” he said, “next Christmas, Basil will be with us again, and we shall be very merry. Baby will begin to know how to laugh too, by that time.”

“God grant he may be with us,” she replied, sadly, “he has been too long gone, John. What a sad Christmas this is. How different from the ones at Charliewood, when aunt Kitty was alive, and I used to go to church so happily, and enjoy the beautiful look of the flowers and green wreaths with which I had

helped to deck it. What merry, merry times those were. How bright the snow was, glittering like silver ! and how pretty the holly berries and mistletoe looked about the room ! We have not a single bough this year."

She glanced round her with a shiver.

"It is all cheerless, Johnnie. Basil away, poor Mary in prison, and ah ! such a heap of bills to pay ! I feel quite hopeless to-day."

John did all he could to cheer his poor friend's spirits, but not with much success, for his own began to sink under the difficulties which surrounded them. There are many to whom Christmas is rendered, by pecuniary difficulties, a period of anxiety and distress ; and such in its fullest extent was the case with the inmates of that solitary dwelling. They had but a shilling in the house, and several of the tradespeople to whom Audrey owed money were clamorous for payment. She would be obliged to sell Basil's piano—all he had left him now—and even for that she could not hope

to get a large sum ; how was she to manage with the care of a house and infant, to work for their bread ! Her poor little brain ached with her anxious thought for the helpless beings who depended on her—the aged woman—the cripple—the tender babe. Dame Page, at dinner, suddenly remembered that it was Christmas, and that she ought to have had a pudding, and murmured bitterly at Audrey for the neglect, declaring that if her own daughter, Mary, had been there *she* would have taken care to provide one. This mere trifle, which at another time, the young hostess would have suffered to pass unheeded, was now the drop that overflowed her cup of misery ; her fancy beheld these helpless ones starving, and reproaching her for their want and suffering, and she rose from the table, stole to the fire-side and leaning her head against the mantel-piece wept aloud.

John Page was greatly distressed. For the first time in his life, he spoke harshly to his

grandmother, and his angry reproaches set the poor old creature into a tremor of fear and sorrow, which also found vent in tears, which her grandson was too much vexed to sooth; but this little scene recalled Audrey's self-possession; she struggled with her own emotion, to comfort the dame, told John he was to blame, and promised the missing pudding the next day.

This little discord in their usually harmonious group, was interrupted by a loud rap at the door; and Audrey obeying the summons, found farmer Atkins standing in the porch.

"A merry Christmas to you, Mrs. Findel-kind," he said, "and a happy new year. I thought I'd just look in and ask how you all were, to-day, and I've brought a letter Hodge gave me for Mr. John Page, which he fetched this morning from the post. But what's the matter; you've been crying—no ill news I hope?"

"No," replied Audrey, "only a little sadness

at the difference between this Christmas and past ones."

"Ay? you find it dull here, with only the old woman, and that poor young man. I don't wonder. Well cheer up. Mr. Findelkind is coming soon, you know."

John Page received the letter with great surprise. Who could have written to him! Save one from Audrey, when she was absent, on her memorable visit to Crowhurst Park, the post had never brought him a dispatch. He opened it eagerly, and a cheque fell from it.

"A Christmas-box, Mr. Page," said the farmer, picking it up, "wish you joy, sir."

John did not answer; he was reading, breathless and with flushed cheeks, the letter which enfolded the money.

"Audrey," he exclaimed, as he concluded it, "Audrey! My poems are printed; people have read them; that money is gained by them. Read this."

And Audrey complying, read, that the

publisher employed by Sir Philip Beaumont had brought out Mr. Page's poems with some success; and begged to know whether he should send a copy to the author; he enclosed a cheque for thirty pounds. The letter was dated a week back, as it had been originally sent to Charliewood. Audrey congratulated her old friend with earnest sincerity. She was so proud, she said truly, of his being a poet; and she pressed his hand with a sister's affection.

Farmer Atkins was quite lost in amazement at the astounding fact that John Page, the cripple, should actually have written a printed book! His respect for him increased immediately, and he looked at him, as at some suddenly discovered wonder. He declared that he never could have believed it—that he couldn't—and that if he never read another book again, he would read that one.

“And now I think of it,” he added, “I have seen ever so many verses in our newspaper,

with the name of John Page a-top of the column, I wonder if they can come out of your book."

John thought they might, and Audrey begged as a great favour that the farmer would let her see the paper. He promised to send it to her that evening; and kept his word; and John Page had then for the first time the pleasure of "seeing himself in print," though only through the medium of the bad type of a small country paper. He thought, however, (though he did not say so,) that his verses looked very well, and read better than in writing, and it was besides very pleasant to read, all the kind things the gentleman who wrote the paper said about them; in truth, John Page was poet enough almost to forget, in the pleasure of this dawning fame, the more substantial encouragement his muse had received. It was not till Audrey and he had well talked over, and discussed the book itself, or rather these extracts from it, that he be-

thought him of the thirty pounds ; and his eyes brightened afresh at the thought of being able to help her.

“ There will be no occasion to sell Basil’s piano,” he said, “ he could not do without one, indeed he could not, and this money will pay the twenty pounds you owe, and keep us till Basil comes. Besides, Audrey, I shall write some more and make more money. Oh ! thank God, thank God !” clasping his hands, “ that I am able henceforward to work for my own bread.”

Audrey tried to make dame Page comprehend the honor and pleasure that had befallen John, but with no great success. The dame could not understand entirely what he had done ; but when Audrey gave her, at supper, a glass of warm elder wine, (Farmer Atkins had sent a bottle to them as a present when he dispatched the newspaper) she nodded and smiled and said, she was glad that Johnnie had written his copy well, and given his reverence satis-

faction, and that she hoped he would be a good boy in future.

Farmer Atkins was that day entertaining a party of merry guests, amongst whom was our friend Tom Taylor. Tom had travelled over some little time before to find out if the old house at which he used to stay, (and which was identical with that occupied by Audrey), was standing yet; and having fallen in with its landlord, and made his acquaintance, invited him to his house, a hospitality which the farmer returned by asking Tom to stay with him a few days at Christmas. As Jean had returned, Tom was rather glad to accept the invitation, leaving his daughter and her husband to keep house during his absence. Gathered round the blazing yule log, the farmer related to his guests that evening the surprising discovery he had made of a poet living at the old house, who was, moreover, a cripple; and from thence he digressed into a warm eulogium upon Audrey, who was, he de-

clared, the nicest young woman he had ever come across."

"The neatest, tidiest lass," he said, "she gets through more work than two or three others put together would, and talks like a printed book ; it is only a pity that she hasn't got a school instead of working at her needle for her bread, she'd teach her pupils to be useful and agreeable too ; I often tell my missis there, that if we had a daughter, I would put her to board with Mrs. Findelkind, to have her taught to be handy and pleasant."

"Her name's something like my daughter's," said Tom, who had been listening with great interest ; "is her husband an Englishman ?"

"No ; he's one of our great singers ; haven't you heard of him ? He makes a great deal by his voice, I can tell you ; but he's away now ; and since he left, the —— Bank broke, and that's made the wife very poor."

"Have they lived here long ?"

"Yes, a good bit of time."

“I should like to go over that house,” said Tom; “it’s many a year since I was in it. It ain’t much changed outside.”

“You shall go there with me to-morrow then,” replied the farmer. “Mrs. Findelkind will be proud to show it you. She’s *such* a tidy little body !”

And the next day, Tom and his host proceeded on a visit which was to present the unknown father to his daughter. Tom gazed round him on the way thither with that sort of melancholy interest with which men of declining years are wont to look upon the scenes of their young day frolics.

“I have spent many a jolly day here,” he said, “with old Twist. He was an extravagant fellow, and always in trouble, but good-natured too. They tell me he came to a bad end.”

“Well,” replied Atkins, “his wife died in an odd way, and it was thought he had killed

her ; but it could not be brought home to him. However, he left the place,, and has never since been heard of ; nobody knows where he is gone, and I am sure nobody cared."

"Hush," said Tom, pausing as they came beneath the lattice window, "what a sweet voice !"

Audrey was singing over her work, and as they were now near enough to see into the room, Tom could gaze at her. She held her infant on her lap, and her eyes often wandered from her embroidery to its little, upturned face.

"She's very pretty," said Tom, in a low tone, "she's like the pictures of the Virgin they have in their churches abroad."

"And she's as good as she looks," replied Atkins ; "come in now, and see how civil-spoken she is."

Audrey received her guests with a modest and cheerful courtesy, and readily complied

with the farmer's request, that she would show Mr. Taylor over the house, excusing herself however from admitting them into the Dame's room, the old woman, "being," she said, "a little ailing, and still in bed."

Alas for Tom ! If he had seen the dame, he would have known his daughter.

Whilst Tom surveyed everything round him with a melancholy interest, the young woman questioned the farmer about Mary ; for he had promised to bring her occasional tidings from the governor of the jail, as to her state of mind and conduct.

"She's kept her promise to you, Mrs. Finkelkind," he said, "and behaves so well, that the governor and the chaplain have noticed her. It's wonderful the good you did that girl."

And in answer to a look of enquiry which Tom directed towards him—for the former felt a strange interest in everything relating to the pretty young woman—he related the incident

of Audrey's having found Mary in the snow, and her after conduct.

"Now, I can't but think," he continued, "that she imposes upon Mrs. Findelkind, and that trusting and believing her is the only unwise thing my tenant ever did, to my knowledge; but it is certain that a few words from her has made the girl tractable and well-behaved."

"I wish the assizes were over," said Audrey, "I am so anxious about her."

"And no wonder!" exclaimed Tom; "for my part, ma'am, I am quite of your opinion; I think she's innocent. I did something just as foolish once in my life, and from the same cause."

It was wonderful to hear Tom, at times, declare he had been guilty of precisely similar follies to every one he heard; he appeared to think his own participation in them redeemed the person blamed from a portion of his delinquency; ever finding in a sense of his own weakness a generous excuse for others.

Poor Tom ! no marvel that, with all your faults, every one who knew you, loved you.

“I should like to see the girl,” he added, “I should really ; but I suppose that would not be allowed ?”

“I don’t know that it would,” replied Atkins ; “but we’ll see. Perhaps, when next Mrs. Findlekind visits the jail you might accompany her.”

“Atkins,” said Tom, as after a rather long visit, they took their leave of Audrey, “I’ve got a plan in my head.”

“What is it ?” asked the farmer.

“It is that if I could get that young woman to let my girl Lucy, live with her, for a while, to be trained in good and pleasant ways, as you said, by her, I should be very glad. You told me she was poor—(Mrs. Findelkind, I mean. It’s odd the names should be so much alike !)—and that she earns her living by her needle ; she might find what I would give her

for Lucy's board and teaching of use to her, and I should be very thankful to get my poor neglected girl such a friend. What do you think, Atkins?"

"Why, that your plan's a very good one."

"But do you think the young woman yonder would be agreeable to it?"

"I'm sure she would, if it were but for the sake of doing good."

"Will you ask her?"

"Ay, willingly. Why not at once?"

"No, stay till I have told you all about my poor Lucy, and then judge if you think Mrs. Findelkind would like to take her."

And Tom recounted his supposed daughter's history. The farmer looked grave at the idea of the organ-grinder husband, and declared he would not introduce such a personage as Jean to his tenant, but that if Tom would answer for the husband keeping away from the place, he thought it might be managed.

Tom was certain he could persuade Lucy to pay such a visit, for a few months, but as her consent was to be gained first, Atkins deferred mentioning the matter till he heard again from his new friend.

CHAPTER XIX.

“You don’t look as if you had spent a very merry Christmas, Lucy,” said Tom, as he kissed his supposed daughter; “you look pale and worn. What’s the matter, my dear?”

“Nothing, only Jean is gone again. He will never live quietly at home.”

“It is a pity,” said Tom, and then he checked himself. “No, my dear, I won’t reproach you for that which was more the fault of other’s neglect. We must try to do without

Jean—and Lucy, I have found a pleasant friend for you, who will, I am sure, comfort you.”

“Who’s that?—farmer Atkins’ wife?”

“No; a young, pretty woman, who is just what I should like you to be, my Luce.”

And Taylor told her of his visit to Audrey.

“She wouldn’t like me, I lay, now,” exclaimed Lucy.

“Yes she would. I’m thinking, dear, if she would have you to stay with her for a while, it would do you good. You’d learn so many nice ways.”

“And you? would you go too, father?” asked the girl, eagerly.

“No, I must stay here, and take care of the house.”

“Then I shan’t go,” she said, resolutely, “I won’t leave you in this lonesome place by yourself.”

“But if I wish it—and indeed I do, Lucy—you will be a good girl, and obey?”

“Not I, father. What! leave you here to have your throat cut?”

“My throat cut, child—what folly is this?”

“I’d be glad to go—so I would—if you go too,” said the girl, with a repressed sob, “I hate this house, father, it’s so lone. If thieves was to come, we couldn’t get no help.”

“Why, Lucy, what put thieves into your head all of a sudden? You’ve have been frightening yourself since Jean left you. How long has he been gone?”

“Two days. Yes, I have been very much afeared. I’m sure we shall be robbed some day.”

“No, no, girl; thieves go to richer houses than this—we’ve no plate, and very little money to tempt them.”

“They *don’t* go to grand houses,” said Lucy, “they as often goes to poor ones—a little is a great deal to them. I’ve heard, afore now, of an old woman being knocked on the head for ten bobs.”

“Say shillings, child,” exclaimed Tom. “Oh, Lucy, you *must* go to school to yonder little woman.”

“I *won't*, unless you goes too; oh, *do* go father, you ain't safe here, I'm sure you ain't. You've a good bit of money now in the house that you bringed back with you from the town, and there's your silver cup, and your watch, and a many things, thieves would be glad to have. Do let us both go.”

She looked imploringly in his face. Tom was startled at the tenor of her remarks. There was something more than the ordinary and causeless fear of a girl in her manner; moreover, Lucy was remarkably bold naturally, and not subject to the slightest constitutional timidity. Could it be possible, that her worthless husband was in league with robbers, and that she had obtained some inkling of the fact! He resolved to try her a little further.

“Your fears are foolish, Lucy,” he said, “and you must not give way to them. I certainly shall not leave this house, and I as certainly expect you to obey me, and go where I wish you for a time. You must prepare to go to-morrow.”

“Oh, not to-morrow—not for three days,” she said; then suddenly resuming her little air of determination, “I won’t go—I won’t go at all. You shan’t make me, father.”

Tom feigned anger at this obstinacy, and Lucy wept, though she persisted in her resolution. Her father was greatly disturbed; one minute he resolved to ask her plainly, if she knew of any positive danger, such as she so suddenly apprehended; the next the good-natured creature shrank from the thought of giving her pain by a causeless and cruel suspicion. He was greatly perplexed and slept but little that night. Once during the course of this involuntary vigil, he thought he dis-

tinguished noises differing from those incidental to night—a footstep on the stairs, and a suppressed breathing.

Towards daydawn, thinking he again heard sounds at the door, he rose, and opened it softly, to convince himself that his ear did not deceive him; and on the mat outside the chamber door, he found Lucy, rolled in a large shawl, and fast asleep. The opening of the door did not disturb her, so heavy was her slumber—she had probably watched for hours, and then been unable to resist her overpowering drowsiness.

Tom stooped down, and touched her hand.

“Lucy, child,” he said, “what are you doing here?”

She started and awoke with a look of alarm.

“What’s the matter, father?”

“Nothing. But why are you here?”

“I don’t know,” she said, rising drowsily, “I suppose I walked in my sleep.”

“Go to your own bed, at once, child—you will catch cold, and be laid up.”

She obeyed in silence, and Tom returned to his pillow, more troubled than before; it was certain that some danger was brewing, and that the poor girl bound, perhaps, by an oath not to betray the secret, was herself thus keeping guard over her father. What should he do? He thought the matter over carefully, and the result of his meditation was an excursion, he made that day to the nearest town, and the arrival, about nightfall, of two constables, and two well armed and strong men from the village, whom Taylor admitted unseen by Lucy, and whom he placed in his bed-room, whither he, with the like secrecy, conveyed spirits, beer, and food.

In the course of the day, he spoke to Lucy about her sleep-walking of the previous night, and urged her to fasten her door, lest she should be subject to a repetition of it. She

promised she would ; but again grew urgent in her entreaties that Tom would leave the house, and live in a less lonely spot. He tried to soothe her evident alarm by promises of speedy compliance.

“I will see if that young woman will let lodgings, Luce,” he said, “and if she will, we will both go and live with her, and she shall teach you. Your warm, kind heart will make her overlook your rough little ways.”

Lucy turned away from him for a moment, and he thought he heard a sob ; the next instant she threw her arms round his neck, kissed him, and cried—

“I do love you, that I do—you kind, good old man.”

“I believe you, my child,” he replied, soothingly, “I know you love me, Lucy. By-the-by, how came my brother to call you Lucy ? none of our family ever were so named.”

"I don't know," she said, with a vacant look. "How can I tell? I was only a baby."

"I remember," continued Tom, thoughtfully, "that I used to say I'd have you christened Audrey, because you were 'a country wench,' it was a name in a play I dearly loved to read. If your poor mother had lived she would have called you so, I'm sure. I don't wonder that Jonathan didn't like it, he always called plays 'profane things,' but I am surprised that he did not name you either Kitty or Mary."

"I never heard of such a name as Audrey," said the girl.

"Nor I, as the name of a living person; but I had taken fancy for it."

Night closed in; and when the father and daughter were about to withdraw to their chambers, Tom earnestly desired Lucy to fasten her door.

"Sleep-walking is so very dangerous," he

observed, "that I have half a mind to lock you in myself. It would be safer, for in sleep people will at times undo the most difficult fastenings."

"No, pray don't," she said, looking disturbed and frightened, "I could not bear to be locked in; I shouldn't sleep a wink. I'll lock my door myself."

Tom found his friends and the constables very merry round a blazing fire, which he had lighted in his chamber, and took his seat amongst them.

"This puts me in mind," he said, as he took a glass of warm spirits and water, "of those old romances in which folks sat up all night in a haunted chamber to watch for a ghost."

"Did they ever catch one, Taylor?" asked Smith, the joiner, with a grin.

"Can't say they did. Generally they were frightened with awful noises; but nothing

came of it. Ghosts ain't sociable folks, they seldom join a company of good fellows."

"Well, I hope we may find *we* ain't watching for a ghost," said the blacksmith; "but I can't say as I think you've much reason to expect thieves any more than ghosts, Mr. Taylor."

"There you are wrong, Master Brockway," observed the constable; "I think, and I have some experience, that there is good cause to watch."

"You know best, Master Constable; Tom has not told me all the particulars."

"Mr. Taylor has shewn great 'cuteness," said the constable—"very. For my part, I think he ought to be made one of the detective force. You put the wooden shutter up to the window, Taylor, didn't you?"

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Tom, in nautical fashion; "and it's so dark, the smoke from the chimney wont be visible."

“Well,” said Smith, “it’s time a stop was put to the thieving that’s been going on in the neighbourhood. There have been three houses broke into this winter.”

“There used to be more of it, though,” observed the constable, “when I first entered on the profession, the country, ’specially here in the North, was in a terrible state.”

And he began relating, to the great amusement and edification of his hearers, a series of robbing exploits which were not exactly calculated to increase their wish for a personal encounter with housebreakers. When the constable ceased, Tom endeavoured to entertain his friends by “spinning” them a few sea yarns ; but as his expressions and style in the telling became rather too technical for their comprehension, and the stories themselves were not very interesting, his voice had the effect of lulling them off to sleep, and by mid-

night, the trio, (and finally Tom himself,) were plunged into a heavy slumber, and nodded at each other in solemn unconsciousness across the table.

It might have been the spirits and water, as well as the warmth and Tom's story-telling, that sent them thus fast asleep; but it is certain that not one of the party—not even the seaman accustomed to watch, and to light slumbering—heard a certain low, grating noise down stairs, the opening of a window, and the withdrawal of a bolt. They were only awakened when a loud scream rang through the house, and a struggle was heard outside the very room door. Then all started up, and Tom, exclaiming—

“That is Lucy's voice,” hurried to the door, and unfastened it, pistol in hand.

As he threw it open, they beheld three men, with one of whom Lucy was struggling. One,

an aged man, held a dark lantern ; the others were young, strong fellows ; one armed with a pistol, the other with a long knife. As the robbers, startled by the sudden opening of the door, looked up and beheld the three armed men, and the still more dreaded apparition of the constable, he who held Lucy loosed his hold, and she sprang at once to her father's side.

The constable and his assistants rushed forward to secure the robbers, and a scuffle ensued, in which he with the knife was wounded in the leg by the discharge of a pistol, and made prisoner, the old man also was taken, and the third ruffian, seeing all was over, uttered a fearful oath, swearing that Lucy should not "peach" for nothing, and before he could be prevented, discharged his pistol at her. The aim was fatally true. The wretched girl, with a piercing cry, sank at Tom's feet, bathed in blood, and in the horror of the mo-

ment, the villain sprang down stairs, and though pursued, effected his escape from the house.

As the smith had been slightly wounded by the knife, and they had two prisoners to take care of, the constable did not think it expedient to follow the wretch, as the gang might have associates outside, and they turned all their attention to the sufferers in the late affray.

Tom placed poor Lucy on his own bed, and with some skill, for he had seen wounds dressed, bound up her side. He then declared his intention of setting out at once in search of a surgeon, begging the constables and blacksmith to remain as a guard over the wounded. But one of the officers insisted on accompanying him, and they set out together.

It was daylight ere the surgeon and Tom stood beside Lucy's couch, and the time that had elapsed, had wrought a fatal change in her.

Her eyes were fast darkening in death, and the doctor, after examining the wound, pronounced it mortal.

"She cannot last above an hour longer," he said, in answer to poor Tom's sorrowful questioning; "it would be cruel to attempt the extraction of the ball, as she would unquestionably die under the operation."

"My poor, poor girl! She has given her life for mine," said Tom; "but she ought to see the parson, Mr. Spalding, if her end's so near."

One of the constables proposed that as he and his comrade were about to lead their captives away to the prison, he should call by the way on the village pastor, and request him to visit the dying girl. Tom thankfully accepted the offer, and returned with a sad heart to his child's bedside.

"Father," she said, as he approached, "I'm dying. The doctor says so, don't he?"

Tom could not answer her, and she rightly interpreted his silence.

"Well, it's no more than I deserve; but," with a sob, "I am afraid, father; you've told me things that make me afraid to die."

"I, my child?"

"Yes; didn't you read to me out of the Great Book you have, that all liars shall go to everlasting fire?"

"Yes, dear; but my Lucy is a good girl. Poor darling; you died to save your old father."

She raised herself with an effort on her arm, and gazed earnestly on his face with her dim, death-clouded eyes.

"I ain't a good girl," she said, with an effort; "I am a liar. You ain't my father, and I ain't your child."

"Lucy!" he exclaimed, "alas! her poor brain wanders, she does not know what she says."

“ Yes, I do—and I’m very sorry—I tell the truth now—Jean found out from Jack all about your daughter, and he persuaded me to pretend I was she.”

“ Good Heaven, can this be possible ?”

“ It was very easy to cheat you,” she continued, sinking back on her pillow ; “ you used to sit and tell me so much about old times, as you called them, and so I learned the folks names, and all about Charliewood, and—oh ! what pain.”

She groaned, and the surgeon, who was still in the room, gave her a few restorative drops.

In a few minutes she continued :—

“ I ain’t your daughter at all. I don’t know whose daughter I am. I belonged to a set of tramps, till Jean married me. They were some of the gang who broke in to-night. One of them shot me. I knew they would come, because granny asked me and Jean so much about the house, and Jean was foolish,

and owned you would bring money home ; but he didn't mean them to rob you. I slept at your door that I might take care of you. They should not have hurt you, whilst I was by, for you were good and kind—very good to me—and I love you.”

She paused, exhausted.

“ And Jean ; is he one of a gang of house-breakers,” asked the amazed and horrified Tom.

“ Oh no ! oh no. He knew nothing of it, it is since he went, that granny came prying about again, and wanted me to open the door to them. But I wouldn't.”

“ Why did you not tell me of their design, my poor girl ; it would have saved your life, if you had ?”

“ I couldn't. If I had, you'd have wondered how I knew, and have found out I was one of 'em. I did all I could. Please, forgive me.”

With tears of pity the kind hearted sailor

assured her of his pardon, and tried to speak of comfort, but her bodily pain was heightened by her mental agony; the confused whisperings and reproaches of a newly awakened conscience; and she answered only by groans and ejaculations of, “where’s the parson—oh dear me—if I’d known better I wouldn’t have done it—oh dear, oh dear.”

The clergyman came with all possible dispatch, and the wretched and long-neglected outcast appeared to derive some comfort from his ministrations. Whilst he prayed she lay quite still, with her eyes closed, only the convulsive twitching of her pretty features showing how she suffered; as he paused, she looked up, and struggling for speech, murmured in a low, broken, beseeching tone:—

“Jean, my poor Jean, find him—teach—” the words died away in an inarticulate murmur, the eyes grew dull and glazed.

“She is gone,” said the clergyman, rising

from his knees, "poor, neglected creature! God have mercy on her."

Tom wept, and even the blacksmith's eyes were moist.

"Oh sir," said Taylor, "it's an awful thing, that in this land such a one as she was, should have been left as ignorant as a heathen. Parsons go out to teach the niggers, and leave folks under our own hedge-rows, and in our own lanes and streets, as ignorant as the brutes. She would have been a good girl, if she'd known how, poor soul! and she *was* good—considering—God knows."

"Who is the Jean she spoke of?" asked the clergyman.

"Her husband, sir."

"We must try and find him," said the good pastor, "her dying request shall not be vain."

"And you'll go a little amongst these poor souls, sir, and teach them? My heart aches for them, and for her."

“I’ll do all I can, Taylor, depend upon it, as far as my own parish is concerned; but, alas! one man can do but little with people who are such birds of passage. Let us pray that a way for enlightening may be devised.”

“They’ve found out one for the niggers, sir—why don’t *that* do for our folks?”

The clergyman was not disposed to discuss the matter with one so little versed in its difficulties, and who, moreover, saw things in such a very straightforward and *uncivilised* way; so he put the question by, and began to enquire more particularly into the history of the departed, which struck him as very singular and interesting.

Numbers of people, meantime, had gathered together round the house, and Tom was obliged to leave the chamber of death, to attend to matters below, which claimed his attention.

A coroner’s inquest closed this brief and sudden tragedy.

The jury pronounced a verdict of “wilful

murder," against the ruffian who had destroyed poor Lucy ; and the eager and active search of the officers of justice terminated shortly afterwards, in his apprehension.

Tom, whose tender nature had been deeply moved by her death, gave the poor girl a decent funeral, followed her to the grave with heartfelt sorrow, and manly tears, and set up a headstone in the church-yard, to her memory, on which he had inscribed :—

HERE LIES LUCY.

HER AGE AND PARENTAGE UNKNOWN.

SHE WAS GOOD AND KIND.

HER ONLY FRIEND LAMENTS HER.

END OF VOL. II.







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